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COVER 1 of 3 • MARCH 2003
THE COMICS MAGAZINE • 138

ON THE SET OF SMALLVILLE

Kristin Kreuk as Lana Lang

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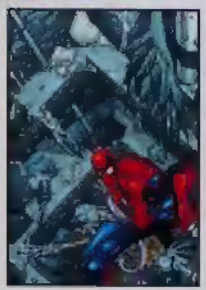

The **Mark/Lion-O** cover (left) was painted by **Alex Ross**. To check out an 8-page preview of the upcoming *Battle of the Planets/Thundercats* crossover, go to **page 34**. The **Spider-Man cover** (center) was drawn by Humberto Ramos and Mark Morales. For a look at where Spider-Man's rogues gallery ranks, see the feature on **page 72**. Our **Smallville** cover (right) is courtesy of The WB, and to get the scoop on how this show achieved bona fide hit status, soar over to **page 50**.

SMALLVILLE (COVER AND THIS PAGE) COURTESY OF THE WB.

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Are you a penciler, inker or colorist looking to break into comics? Now's your chance to win a shot at the big time! Top Cow Productions is looking for the "next big thing" in comics... and it could be you! Head over to **page 86** to get all the details on winning a job in comics!

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EXCLUSIVE OFFER

COOL STUFF THROUGH THE MAIL

DYNAMIC FORCES EXCLUSIVES

Dynamic Forces and Wizard Entertainment team up to offer you some of the hottest comic collectibles imaginable, ranging from signed *G.I. Joe* and *Ultimate Spider-Man* comics to life-sized Spider-Man busts. Zip over to **page 32** to get all the details on these dynamic offers!

MAGIC WORDS

ULTIMATE CONTROVERSY... SIMPSONS: MORALLY DESTITUTE?... & ALEX ROSS' PHONE NUMBER!

Controversy sells, right? Well, there ain't nuthin' more controversial than "Ultimatizing" (or however you wanna spell it) an entire Marvel Universe. Our mail sack overfloweth with the pros and cons (mainly cons) of applying the "no old continuity" model to the entire Marvel Universe. In fact, here comes one of those letters right now...

Dear Wizard,

I read *The Ultimates*, and I like it. I like it because, to me, it's a big divergent timeline, a "What if?" But if it were to replace Marvel's real *Avengers*, I wouldn't like it anymore.

There's no reason to "Ultimatize" the entire Marvel Universe. *Wizard* keeps going on about the Marvel Universe being bogged down by 40+ years of continuity. Well, a *good* writer doesn't get bogged down. A good writer can take that continuity, and use it to write a very cool story.

Case in point: Kevin Smith in the *Spider-Man/Black Cat* miniseries is using Peter and Felicia's shared history to write a kickass story. Would this story be as good if he was making up that history as he went along? I don't think so. It's cool because he is adding to something that is already there.

To me, "Ultimatizing" the entire line is the easy way out. You can update costumes, hairstyles and attitudes *without* rewriting the entire history, and *it's being done right now*. Grant Morrison, J. Michael Straczynski and Brian Michael Bendis are all writing classic stories using classic characters without changing a thing in the characters' history. The way it should be done.

Calvin Teague
Sallisaw, OK

A good counterpoint. Continuity is only a problem if you let it be. Kevin Smith, a chap you mentioned, actually prides himself on writing stories that are *dripping* with continuity, such as his recent 15-issue stint on DC Comics' *Green Arrow*. "It's why you write a Spider-Man or Batman story, as opposed to simply making up a new character—so you can tell a tale with all the benefit of years of backstory," Smith says.

But even continuity fiend that he is, Smith sees the other side of the coin as well. "The 'Ultimate' line is fun, but I'd be against 'Ultimatizing' the entire Marvel Universe. Both seem to be co-existing nicely, so why not have the cake and eat it too?"

Hey, now there's a good idear. Or better yet, pie.

Dear Wizard,

One of the things I didn't like about the new "Spider-Man" movie was that it didn't offer anything new to Spider-Man. Several movies, TV series and radio broadcasts based on comic book heroes actually *did* add to many superhero myths. For example...

Superman: "Faster than a speeding bullet" and Kryptonite came

PHOTOS: PAUL SCHRAUB

BUNNY AWARD

Dear Jim and Wizard,

I would like to suggest a story for your magazine, a "where are they now?" article about comic pencilers. A few that spring to mind right now are Jae Lee and Brett Booth. You could also include older artists who sadly have passed away, along the lines of Walt Simonson and Lee Weeks. I think it would be fascinating to know what these people have been up to.

Jamon Gott
Perth, Australia

Fascinating indeed! Artist *par excellance* Jae Lee just finished a *Darkness* one-shot for Top Cow Productions and Dynamic Forces, and is now cruising on a five-issue run on Marvel's *Captain America* from #12-#16. Meanwhile, Brett Booth is grooving on *Limbo City*, an eight-issue series from Dreamwave Productions.

Now I'm not sure how the news flow is to Perth, Australia, but Walt Simonson sure was surprised to hear he was dead. "I'm very broken up about it," he said, "And next time I talk to Lee Weeks, I'll see how he's bearing up under this news."

Simonson, who does some very good work for a dead guy, will be writing a six-issue stint on *Wonder Woman* starting with February's #189, joined by fellow living artists Jerry Ordway and P. Craig Russell. After that, provided he is still above ground and ambulatory, Simonson will pencil a four-issue *Elric* series at DC.

Lee Weeks is hard at work on a four-issue *Captain America* series written by Dave Gibbons slated for 2003 release, although one wonders how easy it is to get art supplies at the morgue.

from the old radio serials. And Superman first revealed his secret identity to Lois Lane in the movies.

Supergirl: Her new costume in year 2000 debuted in the "Superman Adventures" animated series.

Batgirl: Barbara Gordon was created for the "Batman" TV show.

Firestar: The Marvel character was introduced on the "Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends" cartoon.

Fantastic Four: That atrocious H.E.R.B.I.E. the robot was introduced in the cartoon.

Christopher A. Hayes
chrisahayes@hotmail.com

What about those oh-so-controversial (and, ultimately, just fine) "organic web-shooters"? Indeed, comics have a long history of giving to other media, and an equally long history of getting back. Other examples include the introduction of DC's Wonder Twins in the "Super Friends" cartoon and the current versions of Harley Quinn and Mr. Freeze, who first popped up in "Batman: The Animated Series." And the beat goes on yet today. The Toad was updated in the "X-Men" movie to the delight of geeks everywhere.

To Mr. McLauchlin,

I am aware that comic book writers are busy churning out good material each month, but when they are not working, what other things do they read? I can imagine other comic books, but what about novels? Some writers must be interested in the fascinating worlds of Kurt Vonnegut or Arthur C. Clarke. Or how about non-fiction?

Larry Clemente
Goshen, NY

***Detective Comics* writer Ed Brubaker digs on (duh) detective stories. "I always recommend anything by my favorite authors, Steve Erickson—think Neil Gaiman, but with an American sensibility—and Ross MacDonald, the best of the old mystery writers," he says. "And lately, I've been reading a lot of George Pelecanos' books. *Down by the River Where the Dead Men Go* is my favorite of his. And I'm also rereading Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is one of the finest works of fiction ever. Even if you've seen the movie, there's still a lot the book has to offer."**

***Fantastic Four* scribe Mark Waid falls into your latter, real-world category. "When I'm not writing, I'm up to my keyboard in non-fiction," Waid says. "This house is a subscription home to every current-events and science magazine under the sun."**

Dear Wizard,

I just got done reading Marvel's *Marville* at my local comic shop. I can only say I am thankful I did not buy this "comic." It is by far the worst thing put out by Marvel, let alone DC, the company the book tries to spoof. What was Bill Jemas trying to prove? That anyone can write a comic?

How about instead of a contrived "U-Decide" contest pitting Jemas' book against two other books, Marvel just hires me to write a one-shot spoofing Marvel? The positive press that would result from letting an everyday comic fan write a

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comic would be far greater than that which the "U-Decide" contest generated.

Rod Lamberti
Ankeny, IA

***Anyone* can write a comic? You may be right. Check out April's *Marville* #7, and you can learn more. I will say no more.**

Dear Demented Ones,

How about some news concerning Godzilla? Will there ever be any new *Godzilla* comics?

George Taylor
Westville, SC

Ever? I'm sure there will. In the foreseeable future? Nah. No plans, although Dark Horse Comics *still* has the comic publishing rights.

So you may wish to slake your lizardly thirst on the most recent of Big G four-color offerings from Dark Horse. The 'Horse has a Tokyo-load of irradiated offerings available at its official retail Website, www.tfaw.com. You can even get the 1993 classic one-shot *Godzilla vs. Charles Barkley*.

No, really.

Hey Jim,

Now that TriLunar, the video game company Joe Madureira was part of has folded, will he be returning to comics anytime soon? He would be perfect to take over after Jim Lee finishes his run on *Batman*. Or will he pick up where he left off on *Battle Chasers*? Any clues?

B. Grigg
bmg54@hotmail.com

Here's a clue right from the Mad Man himself: "I've been snapped up by another game developer," Madureira says. "Interestingly enough, TriLunar's demise only strengthened my resolve to work in the game industry. As for comics, I hope to be able to do some smaller projects here and there as my schedule permits, and contractually, there's nothing preventing me from doing just that."

What could "just that" be?

"I have to admit, every once in a while I get this bug up my ass to work on *Battle Chasers* again," Madureira admits. "Mostly because game dudes read the book and keep teasing me about it. We'll see."

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Gente del Wizard:

What's the deal with Indonesia? These guys are always winners in the "Letter Art" section!

Miguel Garay
Lima, Peru

I said it before, I'll say it again: Foreign "Letter Art" beats the pants off the home-grown stuff. Most U.S. wannabe artists I see just copy an existing drawing, often even aping

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QUICK HITS

Am I the only one that wells up with tears after reading *every* new issue of *Rising Stars*?

—Mike Kropman, mgkropma@hotmail.com

After reading "Four Play," on your four best buzz books today [*Wizard* #135], I have a fifth: *Black Panther*.

—Jason Borelli, lantern75@msn.com

I'm disappointed by DC Comics' decision to drop their letter columns. I liked getting letters published there. Can I start bugging you instead?

—Fletch Adams, fletchadams@eudoramail.com

As much as I enjoy the humorous tone of your magazine, I must tell you that the serious article on Bill Finger and Batman in *Wizard* #135 is your best effort to date.

—K. McConnell, Pilot Point, TX

Thank you for article on Bill Finger. It's sad that he did not get the recognition Bob Kane received. I hope your "Unmasking Batman" article brings peace to Finger's soul.

—Allen Klingelhoets, Barron, WI

With the exception of Batman looking like the Midnighter, I loved your "Ultimization" of DC's heroes [*Wizard* #136]! Kudos to Draxell Jump Studios for the great art.

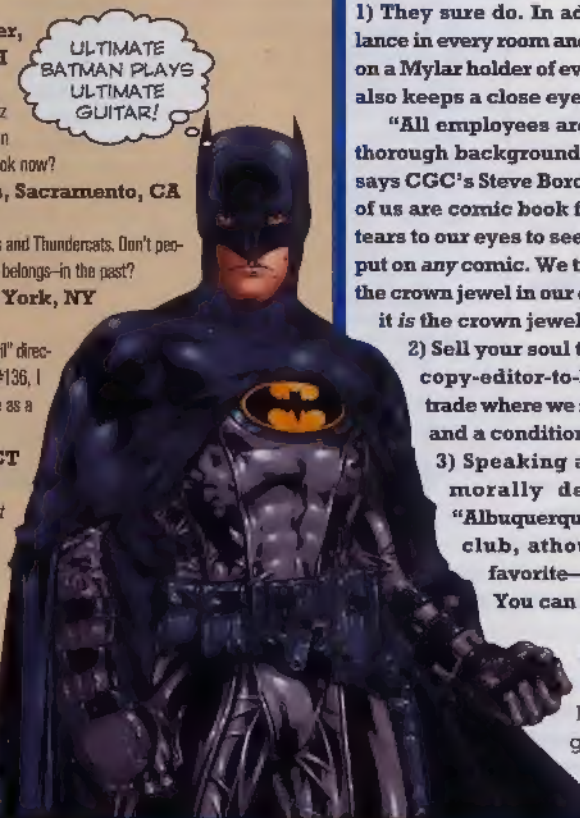
—Sean Mitchell, donkingcolorado@hotmail.com

"Ultimizing" DC? A good idea, plain and simple.

—Sean Rogers, Atlanta, GA

The "Ultimate" Wonder Woman costume from *Wizard* #136 is easily the best I've *ever* seen for the character!

—Robert Frazier, Lansing, MI



I took the G.I. Joe "'80s Extreme" quiz [*Wizard* #136] and scored better than writer Larry Hama. Can I write the book now?

—Kevin Phillips, Sacramento, CA

I'm *already* tired of seeing Transformers and Thundercats. Don't people realize the past is best left where it belongs—in the past?

—Joseph Sabale, New York, NY

After reading the interview with "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson in *Wizard* #136, I respect him...because he respects me as a comic fan.

—G. Nino, Bristol, CT

Thanks for introducing me to *Y-The Last Man*. This, and most of the Vertigo line, is great stuff!

—Jeffrey Land, Coral Gables, FL

I've now read all 28 volumes of *Lone Wolf and Cub*. It was decades in the making, but worth the wait.

—Benji de la Rosa, Brownsville, TX

the style of the artist they're swiping from. It seems most non-U.S. entries we get are drawings that are totally original, and come right outta the head of the artist. Those usually win.

Hint: If ya wanna get published in "Letter Art," try something new. Don't just copy an existing piece. Most our foreign entrants tend to do that. And Peru does okay by itself, too. *¡Viva Lima!*

Hey Jim,

I got some questions for you, seeing as how you're the question-answering guy and all:

1) Comics Guaranty Corporation is obviously getting big and will probably continue to grow. I've considered getting some of my books graded by them. But I've been wondering: Do they have any way to insure the well-being of my comics so they don't get maliciously mishandled or even swiped by some inspector while there?

2) Aside from a serious lack of self-respect, what does it take to get an internship or job at *Wizard*?

3) Our local minor league baseball team, formerly the Albuquerque Dukes, has been renamed the Albuquerque Isotopes, after the Springfield Isotopes of "Simpsons" fame. I think it's a great name. Problem is, there's an awful lot of opposition, mostly from old geezers who think "The Simpsons" is morally destitute. What thinketh you? About the team name, that is?

David DePuydt
Rio Rancho, NM

1) They sure do. In addition to state-of-the-art surveillance in every room and bar-coded serial numbers placed on a Mylar holder of every submission for tracking, CGC also keeps a close eye on the human element.

"All employees are carefully screened and given a thorough background check before working at CGC," says CGC's Steve Borock. "And don't forget, since most of us are comic book fanatics ourselves, it would bring tears to our eyes to see even the most minute stress line put on *any* comic. We treat every comic book as if it were the crown jewel in our own collection—because we know it *is* the crown jewel in someone else's."

2) Sell your soul to the devil. The devil still owns a copy-editor-to-be-named-later from an earlier trade where we sent him Gareb Shamus' old Lexus and a conditional 2004 draft pick.

3) Speaking as a duly authorized rep of the morally destitute, I'm fer it! I think "Albuquerque Isotopes" is fine name for a ball-club, athough not as fine as my all-time favorite—the Nebraska Bugeaters. You can look it up.

Dear Jim and Other Less Important Staff of Wizard,

I just bought *Wizard* #134, and you guys inspired me with "Comics We Wanna See." I spent the whole day thinking of brand-new comic

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In *Wizard* #137 (p. 84-85), we ran the "4th Annual Direct to Video Contest" where we asked all of you fantastic fans to create an original short film that would interest the typical *Wizard* reader (superheroes, sci-fi, goofball superhero/sci-fi humor, etc.). Make a parody trailer for "Spider-Man 2: Electric Boogaloo," create the E! True Hollywood Story on Lobo, re-enact a scene out of comics using toys–GO CRAZY! The winner will go to Wizard World Chicago August 8-10, as well as have their video critiqued by "Smallville" creators Al Gough, Miles Millar and their entire staff!

Please send us your video on a regular VHS tape, so we can watch it without seeing just color bars and static. And make sure to include your name, address, phone number, email address and date of birth on the entry. Entries are due on May 1, 2003.

Don't forget to send your entry to:

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P.S. Remember, no profanity (though profanity bleeped is okay), no nudity (though nudity hidden by censored bars is fine) and no videos longer than five minutes!!!

books, and here they are:

1) *Magic: The Gathering*: The whole story of Magic cards could create a best-seller.

2) *South Park*: Yeah, it would be R-rated, but funny as heck!

3) *Resident Evil*: The virus has expanded more than ever and just one person can save humanity…Jill, the lonely survivor of S.T.A.R.S.

Are these comics ever gonna make it? And if they do, am going to get some money for the ideas? Um…I think I know the answer to that one.

Matt Duarte
mattias_duarte@yahoo.com

Hmmmm. *Magic: The Gathering* comics have been tried, but unless there are cool playable game cards inserted, no one has shown much interest. The Magic Comic 8-ball says, "Looks doubtful."

"South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone have often danced around the notion of a *South Park* comic, but they just don't think there's much money in it, so they've shied away.

However, video game-to-comic adaptations are plentiful, and WildStorm Productions has done some *Resident Evil* comics in the past. You may someday see more.

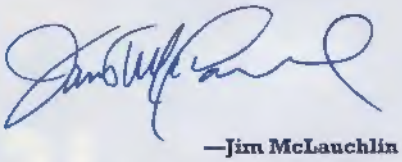
To Wizard,
Any way I can get in touch with Alex Ross?

Jason Kyle
APO AE 09303

Sure. I'll sell you his home phone number for $20.

Or, if you're reading, Alex, I'll keep it private for $25.

And that's all the crap that's fit to print. Meet me back here next month. Until then, I remain…



—Jim McLauchlin

Jim McLauchlin is like the wind—you never really see him, but he blows all the same.

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AS THE WORLD TURNERS

Top Cow superstar artist bolts to form own publishing company

Surviving a bout with cancer forced Mike Turner to reevaluate his life. As a result, the artist extraordinaire arrived at the decision that he wanted more out of his professional career. So after eight years at Top Cow Productions in which he skyrocketed to superstardom on *Witchblade* and *Fathom*, Turner exclusively revealed to *Wizard* that he's decided to leave the Cow in order to begin his own entertainment company.

"My life experience of the last three years has really changed me," explained Turner. "I'm a different guy. You get something like cancer and you realize that you can't just wait around for things to happen. I want to do it now. I want to get everything in place and go out and make my own mark."

Turner will make his own mark at his yet-unnamed company that will begin publishing *Fathom* as well as his two new projects, both of which he'd originally planned to publish at Top Cow. Turner will also take his protégé, Talent Caldwell (*Fathom: Killian's Tide*), to the new company, with plans to begin publishing by Summer 2003.

"It'll just be me and Talent for starters," said Turner. "We'll have a couple books out a month and just make sure those are the best books out there. Talent will be actually taking over *Fathom*, while I start these next two projects."

The two new projects aren't just relying on Turner's name to sell them either. *JSA* and *Avengers* scribe Geoff Johns has signed on to pen *Ekos*, which takes place on a peaceful alien world based in natural mysticism that's invaded by aliens. *Batman* writer Jeph Loeb also jumped at the idea of working with Turner on *Dragonfly*, which centers on a young telepath who must master his mystic powers to save the futuristic world he lives in. Look for both new series to be exclusively previewed in *Wizard*

#139 with your chance to vote on which series Turner begins work on first.

For Turner, who spent almost his entire professional career at Top Cow and was personally recruited by Top Cow founder Marc Silvestri, the decision to leave was an extremely difficult one.

"This has been the best and worst week of my life," said Turner. "It was awful, it was like getting divorced. Obviously it's very sad and I'm going to miss those guys a lot and hopefully I'm not just slamming the door. Never seeing them again would kill me but this is something I have to do for myself."

"We had a great relationship and we love this guy," said Silvestri. "We wish him the best of luck. This has been a great eight years and we look forward to working with Mike in the future. We wish him all the success in the world."

Like other artists who've broken away from major publishers to venture into self-publishing, Turner knows missed deadlines and multiple months between issues won't be accepted by fans. So the artist has come up with a simple way to avoid it—work harder than ever before.

"I think my output will definitely be faster than it has been lately because it's been a motivational factor," explained the 31-year-old artist, who was forced to take close to a year off of *Fathom* due to cancer treatment and subsequent rehab.

"The last few years have had some impact on my life which has changed my output," said Turner. "But now I'm motivated and I can't wait to get to the drawing board. I have to be the owner of the team and the best player all at the same time."

Turner also revealed he'll have a business support structure to help him run the opening of the studio to cut down on the amount of time he'll spend in the board room instead of at the drawing board.

"The most exciting thing about this is just the unlimited opportunities and standing on my own two feet," said the artist. "I've always been given relative good, wide berth and autonomy at Top Cow. But this is something where I have a lot of different stuff.

"We've got toys and sculpt deals—different opportunities I can't even talk about yet. I'm not an egomaniac and I don't get off on being my own boss but I am going to be really excited about the opportunities that are out there for anybody who works with me at that company."

Turner said one of the first things he'll work on at his new company will actually be old ideas he's never had the chance to use at Top Cow.

"I've got a lot of ideas that I haven't been able to use, only because I was in a certain framework that I didn't want to use it in," said Turner. "With this new entertainment company, I'm going to have a lot more opportunity to do these things. I'm going to start small though. I'm not going to go out and hire a lot of people. I do want to grow some things eventually and I have a couple of other ideas in my head and I have some ideas of artists I'd like to work on them. I don't want to get out there and shoot myself in the foot before I can get started." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

TURNER'S EXIT OPENS THE DOOR FOR NEW TALENT AT THE COW

FUTURETOPDOGS

SKROCE

Just like Ed McMahon, Top Cow's gearing up for a star search.

With Mike Turner (*Fathom*) leaving the Marc Silvestri-founded Image imprint and J. Michael Straczynski (*Rising Stars*) working exclusively for Marvel Comics, new Top Cow Editor-in-Chief Jim McLauchlin's been brought on board to head Top Cow's next creative explosion.

And according to McLauchlin, he's already got his eye on a few big-time comic book players.

"The first part of the plan is to publish more and publish better," explained McLauchlin, a former contributing editor at *Wizard*. "And that basically means bringing in new creators, bringing in new properties and finding new things to publish. And it also means taking the existing creators and titles we have and finding new and better ways to do that. Some of that will entail new talent and some of it will entail re-purposing existing talent and some of it will be going into the Top Cow library, pulling something out and re-purposing it."

SMITH

McLauchlin also revealed his short list of talent he'd like to see at Top Cow, consisting of big names such as penciler Steve Skroce (*Wolverine*), writer Paul Dini (*Jingle Belle*) and painter Alex Ross (*Battle of the Planets*). But at the very top of the new E-I-C's list is writer/director Kevin Smith (*Daredevil: Target*).

"I'd love to see Kevin at the Cow," revealed McLauchlin. "But Kevin has said movies are his day job and the comics are for fun. That's led to his output being a little sporadic and I think that's fine for the Cow. I'd love to just have a couple of things a year from him."

McLAUCHLIN

While Skroce's output has also been slow of late due to his work on the two "Matrix" film sequels, McLauchlin said now that his movie work is behind him, Skroce has piqued his interest.

"Skroce is an amazingly talented artist and when he does comics, they're a joy to look at," said McLauchlin. "Now that he's done with his 'Matrix' work, he's a great unused talent and I'll be calling him soon."

Of course, Ross is already working for Top Cow on covers and interior layouts for *Battle of the Planets* but McLauchlin sees Ross' role becoming even more hands-on at the studio in 2003 and don't be surprised if some of Ross' close friends like Dini follow suit.

DINI

"I think Paul Dini's one of the most emotional storytellers in the business," said McLauchlin. "I've already got a very specific one-shot I'll be pitching his way." ■ **MC**

THE BUZZBIN

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE COMIC INDUSTRY

BUDGET BLUES Reports are now circulating that Fox's "X-Men 2" may be the last "X-Men" film fans see with the current cast, due to a casting budget for "X-Men 3" that could exceed $100 million. But worry not fans, rumor has it that Hugh Jackman is ready for a solo Wolverine film.

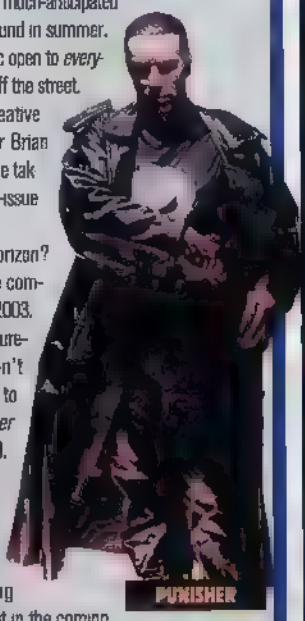
'EPIC' PROPORTIONS Word is Marvel's much-anticipated Epic Comics line will finally get off the ground in summer. And Marvel wants to throw the doors to Epic open to *everyone*–new talent, old talent and even fans off the street.

VILLAINS, INC. Rumor has it the creative team behind *Batman: Deathblow* (writer Brian Azzarello and penciler Lee Bermejo) may be taking on one of DC's biggest villains in a four-issue mini-series in 2004.

IRON MILLAR What's that on the horizon? Rumor has it an Iron Man series could be coming from *Ultimates* scribe Mark Millar in 2003.

MAD MAX Heard rumors of Marvel's mature-reader imprint, MAX, dying out? Don't schedule a funeral just yet. According to sources at Marvel, Garth Ennis' *Punisher* may move to the MAX imprint in mid-2003.

PAYING HOMAGE Big plans are in store for DC's Homage line in 2003. Reports are surfacing that writers Geoff Johns (*Flash*) and Brian K. Vaughn (*Y–The Last Man*) may be writing creator-owned projects for the DC imprint in the coming year.



PUNISHER

ULTIMATE EXIT With Mark Millar planning to leave *Ultimate X-Men* this summer, a pair of writers with no experience working on the X-books will reportedly take over. Let the speculation begin.

MUSICAL COMICS Indy artist fave Jim Mahfood has moved to L.A. and hit both the art *and* music scenes. Mahfood did "live art" at L.A.'s El Rey Theater in December with DJ Z-Trip. Mahfood cranked out giant murals on the walls while Z spun funk and hip-hop records, and the pair plan many such gigs in the future.

DC BULLETS DC is getting more aggressive in the search for exclusive talent. Some creators say that the publisher is offering up to $10,000 bonuses to sign on.

HONOR THY TV "No Honor," based on the Top Cow comic of the same name, is being cast as a two-hour movie with ongoing series possibilities at Showtime in Fall 2003. The Cow is looking to launch *No Honor II* in conjunction with the TV release.

MARVEL ASIA Marvel's reaching out to Japan for more manga talent like *Uncanny X-Men* artist Kia Asamiya (see feature on **page 54**). Marvel E-I-C Joe Quesada, Marvel manga guru C.B. Cebulski and Kevin Smith will make a trip to Tokyo in February to hunt for new talent and promote Marvel Comics in Japan.

DREAM COM? Sources close to Dreamwave Production say that the publisher is in the final stages of a contract with Capcom that will give DW the right to publish comics based on Capcom characters such as Mega Man and Devil May Cry.

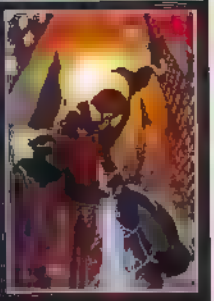
IRON MAN

HOT READS

5 BOOKS WE CAN'T WAIT TO PICK UP

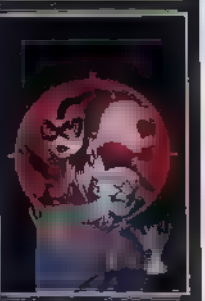
Every month at *Wizard*, our editors read through hundreds of comic books. And like all fans, we get psyched about upcoming storylines and creative changes. Here are the five books that we are champing at the bit to read and why you should pick them up, too!

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #38 After nearly 35 years, the Peter Parker/Mary Jane relationship may finally be on the rocks! Is divorce imminent? Or has Pete got some crazy mad makeup sex planned? We can't wait to find out, but if their recent separation and MJ's relocation to Hollywood is any indication, Pete may wanna call Jacoby & Meyers!

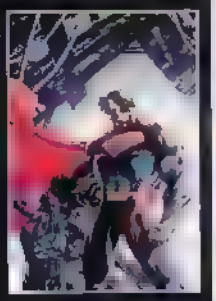


HULK #50 Bruce Jones' run has been nothing short of superb, transforming the book from mindless smash 'em up into a nail-biting, man-on-the-run thriller. But with this ish, we get an appearance by the very first supervillain to show up during Jones' tenure, and it just so happens to be the Abomination, the terrifying man-monster even more powerful than the Hulk! Somebody book this fight on HBO!

HARLEY QUINN #28 You've gotta pick up this issue to see how the new creative team of A.J. Lieberman, Mike Huddleston (*The Coffin*) and Troy Nixey have transformed Harley Quinn from a campy sidekick to a vicious criminal mastermind. The new storyarc, which began in issue #26, finds Harley striking out on capers all her own–but one of these jobs gets her framed for murdering a cop, and his partner's out for revenge!



BATMAN #612 The two biggest icons in DC history–Batman and Superman–slugging it out for the first time in continuity. Does it get any bigger than this? Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's *Batman* run has been amazing so far, but this Superman guest appearance and ensuing slugfest takes their run to new heights. Can't wait for the battle? Then check out Lee's Batman vs. Superman "Last Man Standing" on **page 30**.



DAREDEVIL #44 February's the Month Without Fear! "Daredevil" the movie hits theaters on Feb. 14 and there's two issues shipping this month, which see Matt Murdock having to defend his secret identity once again. All this comes hot on the heels of two January issues, including the 25-cent #41; the *Daredevil Movie Adaptation* by ultra-hot *Hulk* writer Bruce Jones and the end of the *Ultimate DD/Elektra* mini-series.

NEWSFLASHES

DAY OF DOOM *Fantastic Four* writer Mark Waid promised a new and different Dr. Doom and he plans to deliver it in March's *FF* #67 in which artist Mike Wieringo's newly designed Doom debuts.

FANTASTIC FOUR

BAP-TASTIC Writer Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen*) and artist Lee Weeks (*Incredible Hulk*) relaunch *Captain America Lives Again*, a four-issue mini-series slated for summer release from Marvel Comics. The series examines what really makes a man a hero and features what would have happened if the Nazis has won World War II.

X-FILES Marvel's movie madness kicks off in March with two "X-Men 2" comic prequels. Writer Brian K. Vaughn and penciler Tom Mandrake reveal what Wolverine did between "X-Men" and "X-Men 2" in *X-Men 2 Movie Prequel: Wolverine*, while writer Chuck Austen, alongside penciler Karl Kerschel, focuses on the newest movie star in *X-Men 2 Movie Prequel: Nightcrawler*.

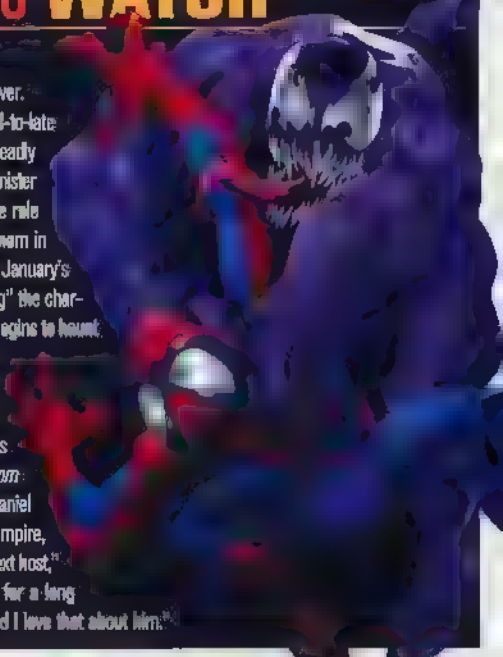
MACE IN YOUR FACE Get ready, "Star Wars" fans, because Dark Horse is offering up a new story starring the most bad ass Jedi in the galaxy, Mace Windu. *Star Wars: Jedi—Mace Windu*, written by Haden Blackman with pencils by Jan Duursema, finds the head of the Jedi Council in the midst of a Jedi civil war, as the keepers of the peace begin to divide on the brink of the Clone Wars. Find out if Mace can re-establish order between the Jedi this February.

THREE AMIGOS Following up 1999's DC *Elseworlds* mini-series *JSA: The Liberty Files*, writer Dan Jolley and artists Tony Harris and Ray Snyder reform for February's two-issue *Elseworlds* mini-series *JSA: The Unholy Three*. Picking up eight years after *Liberty Files*, *Unholy Three* finds the Bat, the Owl and the Glock hot on the trail of a pair of KGB operatives known as Parasite and Steelwolf.

HARK YOU CAN DRIVE MY KARZA

CHARACTER TO WATCH

VENOM



Venom's back—and thankfully as bad as ever.

After several failed attempts in the mid-to-late '90s at reviving one of Spider-Man's most deadly villains (including a brief team-up with the Sinister Six and a mini-series where he played the role of a hero), Marvel has major plans for Venom in 2003. Things kicked off for the symbiote in January's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #34–#35, "ultimizing" the character as a lab experiment gone awry that begins to haunt Peter Parker. However, that's not all the House of Ideas has in store for the Spider-Man doppelganger. Along with an appearance in *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* this summer, fans can check out an all-new *Venom* ongoing series in late April, written by Daniel Way. "Our Venom is going to be like a vampire, sucking people dry and moving on to the next host," hints Way. "I've wanted to write Venom for a long time now, just because he's psychotic, and I love that about him."

HEAT INDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard*, so here's some cool things we read and saw this month.

JLA/JSA: VIRTUE & VICE (DC Comics) Simply put, one of the best team-ups in the history of this illustrious tradition. Geoff Johns and David Goyer conceived a terrifying villainous duo that fans of both teams will recognize instantly, and combined with Carlos Pacheco's stunningly rendered art, this is one graphic novel that's a must-have for any fanboy.

ULTIMATE WAR #1 (Marvel) After seeing Captain America charge headlong into a room full of evil mutants...and kicking major ass, Hawkeye taking down Rogue from a quarter-mile away with a shock arrow; the destruction of the Brooklyn Bridge; and the possibility that the X-Men are working with the Brotherhood, we're hooked on the *Ultimate War* and can't wait for more.

THREE DAYS IN EUROPE (Oni Press): The halls of *Wizard* may be dripping with testosterone, but every now and then a romantic romp like Oni Press' *Three Days in Europe* comes along and douses our collective manliness. The story of a troubled couple that find themselves in Europe had us laughing and anxiously waiting for the next issue.

JLA/JSA: VIRTUE & VICE

TREVOR HAIRSINE We were floored when we saw the pencils by British up-and-comer Trev Hairsine on *Captain America* #7. Living up to the hype, Hairsine amazed us with breakneck action sequences, eerie flashback scenes and the ability to make Cap look like the grizzled, war-scarred hero he so deserves to be.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER VIDEO GAME (Electronic Arts) Killing vampires with stakes, garden utensils and bats has never been more fun than in the new *Buffy* video game. Chat up series characters ranging from Angel to Giles or throw down with vamp big bads like Spike. It's a bloody good time.

"THE TWO TOWERS" (New Line) Battle scenes that put "Braveheart" to shame! Giant monsters! Three hours of Orc ass kicking! Mix in the coolest talking trees since "Wizard of Oz," the craziest vertigo-inducing opening fight sequence EVER and a CGI Gollum that should win best Supporting Actor and "Two Towers" stands tall! Just remember to pee before it starts.

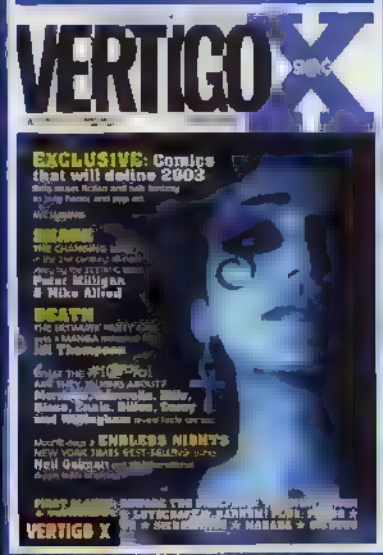
100 BULLETS #40 (Vertigo/DC) The shocking death of a longtime *100 Bullets* fixture had our jaws on the floor for the better part of a week! Brian Azzarello's gripping crime thriller dazzles and bedevils us, and this ish proves once again that *anything* can happen in the world of *100 Bullets*.

titled *Kerze*, written by Jen Krueger and penciled by [illegible] Image Comics/Devil's Due Publishing. See how the wicked dictator of the '80s [illegible] went from Pharaoh-child to [illegible] conqueror of worlds this February!

A LITTLE (HAN) SOLO LOVE Just in time for Valentine's Day, Dark Horse offers up *Star Wars: A Valentine Story*. Written by Judd Winick (*Exiles*) [illegible] *Valentine Story* tells the romantic tale of Princess Leia and Han Solo amidst a raging snowstorm on the [illegible] planet of Hoth. Feel the love this February.

BOX OF TAGALONGS, ANYONE? This February, Jim Mahfood brings his ultra-cute, utterly independent and [illegible] Girl-Scouts to Image Comics in a four-issue mini-series titled *Grrl Scouts: Work Sucks*. After the girls destroyed the evil Nykee [illegible] dealing business and finding (*gulp*) legitimate jobs.

10 YEARS AND COUNTING! To celebrate their 10th anniversary, DC/Vertigo will release *Vertigo X Anniversary Preview*, a 44-page one-shot (priced at only 99¢!) in February, which will preview upcoming 2003 projects and serves as a retrospective through interviews with Neil Gaiman, Joe Kubert and Grant Morrison.



GRAYSON EXCLUSIVE DC Comics announced that *Nightwing* writer Devin Grayson has signed an exclu[illegible] always felt like family to me," said Grayson. "From day one, these were the people who believed in and trusted me."

LOCK DOWN More woes for Stan Lee's now-defunct Internet company, Stan Lee Media. In December, SLM COO Stephen M. Gordon and his brother, Jonathan Gordon, were found guilty of conspiracy, [illegible] statements to a financial institution. Sentencing is scheduled for May 12, [illegible] minimum sentence of four years in federal prison.

TOP 10 THINGS THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER WILL BE DOING NOW THAT HE'S BEEN GIVEN THE BOOT FROM THE JLA

10) Do lunch with Joe Quesada, slip "Ultimate Martian Manhunter" into conversation.

9) Work on that "Justice League Argentina" pitch with Bat Hombre.

8) Sandwich himself between the con booths of Lou Ferrigno and that guy who played Superboy; begrudgingly mark autographs down to $5 a pop.

7) Count days until those little Olsen twin minxes turn 18.

6) Track down and kill casting director who picked that fat guy from "M*A*S*H" to play him in that '90s TV movie.

5) Bite into Mars bar, chew, cry about his dead people.

4) Sit quietly on the couch, stare unblinkingly at the wall and try to figure out why a giant green hairless man in short-shorts and suspenders isn't more popular

3) Make that ALF puppet pay!

2) Think about less threatening name; check to see if "Cap'n Snazzy" is taken.

1) Two words: Center square

Wanna see Alex Ross? You've got but one place to go.

The only conventions the *über*-painter and visionary behind such works as *Marvels* and *Kingdom Come* will be at in 2003 are the Wizard World conventions!

The Ross-fest starts at Wizard World East in Philadelphia, May 30-June 1, 2003, where Alex will be the Guest of Honor. It's your chance to meet the man and see behind the scenes of *Battle of the Planets* and his new 2003 super-project, *JLA: Liberty and Justice*.

And that ain't all Wizard World East will also feature...

- Hulk, Hulk and more Hulk! With the "Hulk" movie hitting screens hot on the heels of the con, Wizard World East will be a gamma-irradiated pivot point with *Hulk* creators past and present, Hulk exhibits and special Hulk merchandise you can't get anywhere else!
- Guests such as Frank Cho (*Liberty Meadows*), Joseph Michael Linsner (*Dawn*), Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and a titanic trio of artistic Kuberts—Joe, Adam and Andy Kubert!
- An amazing array of cool programming, great giveaways, delightful dealers, and random babes in homemade Tomb Raider costumes. Hubba-hubba!

Tickets ($20 for 1 day, $40 for 3 days) can be purchased online at www.wizardconventions.com.

GAY 'KID' NETS MARVEL RAW EXPOSURE

Stan Lee comes out of the closet to debate merits of character on CNN

Believe it or not, the hottest character in comics these days doesn't swing around New York on synthetic webbing or have an adamantium-laced skeleton. Rather, comic's newest "in" character wears the latest French fashions, has a penchant for show tunes and—shocker of shockers—is a *cowboy*! Oh, and he's gay.

Granted, Marvel's outlaw vigilante, the Rawhide Kid, has been around since the 1940s, but besides a few random cameos in other books, had been completely forgotten by fans. All of this soon changed however with the announcement that in the February four-issue mini-series titled *Slap Leather* (written by Ron Zimmerman with art by John Severin), the character known throughout the Marvel U as having the fastest guns in the West would be revealed as a homosexual.

Yet while gay characters are nothing new to comic fans (for example, Northstar, *The Authority's* Midnighter and Apollo and Jarvis from *Ultimates* just to name a few), *Slap Leather* quickly caught the attention of the mainstream media. The mini-series has garnered so much attention that not only has Marvel put a kibosh on media requests, but Chairman Emeritus Stan Lee was invited to CNN's "Crossfire" to debate the title with Andrea Lafferty, executive director of the Traditional Values Coalition.

"Let me just mention that Marvel Comics—we are entertainers," argued Lee on the Dec. 12 episode of "Crossfire." "We do books for everybody, and the characters in our books represent everybody. Among us today are gay people. We have one gay hero, and there's nothing wrong with that. I'm sure there are gay heroes who exist."

However, the discussion of gay characters didn't end with the Rawhide Kid. Crossfire host Tucker Carlson also brought DC's Robin and his questionable sexuality into play, to which Lee could only answer, "You'll have to ask somebody at DC. I have too many friends there to answer that." ■

FEBRUARY IS
DAREDEVIL
2 ISSUES THIS MONTH!
YOUR ONE-STOP SOURCE FOR ALL THINGS DAREDEVIL!
MIDTOWN COMICS
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ACTOR AUCTION ROLLS OUT THE SWAG

George Pérez will be there. So will 20 members of the JLA and Avengers.

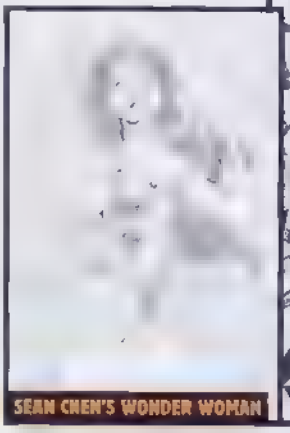
ACTOR, A Commitment To Our Roots, the only federally chartered charity dedicated strictly to helping out old-time comic creators in need, is staging its fourth charity auction at the Orlando MegaCon, Feb. 28-March 2, 2003. Over 100 lots from a star-studded cast of artists go up on the block, with all proceeds benefiting the fund.

Pérez has donated a stunning "re-imagining" of the classic *Justice League of America* #21 cover, featuring 20 JLA and Avengers members. Also included in the auction are

- Alex Ross' painted cover to *Earth X* #7
- Joe Quesada's "Sydney Savage" full-page pin-up from the *Danger Girl Special*
- A massive Gary Frank *X-Men* wraparound cover featuring a dozen merry mutants
- An incredible Jeff Smith sketch featuring the famed *Bone* creator's take on Superman, Batman and Captain Marvel
- Contributions from Sean Chen, Walter Simonson, Bruce Timm, Mark Bagley, Mike Wieringo, Dave Johnson and many, many more!

Art updates can be seen right now at the ACTOR Website! Check out: **www.ACTORComicFund.org**

GEORGE PÉREZ'S JLA/AVENGERS



SEAN CHEN'S WONDER WOMAN

REWRITE MARVEL HISTORY WITH NEW ROLEPLAYING GAME

MARVEL UNIVERSE ROLEPLAYING GAME

RELEASE DATE: Hardcover released in May 2003. Softcover version available in *InQuest* #96 (on sale March 5).

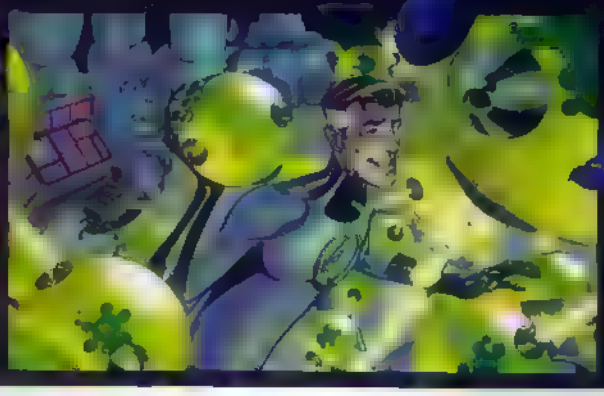
WHY IT'S COOL: Who will be in the next Avengers lineup? Can the Fantastic Four defeat Galactus? What's Wolverine's *real* origin? With the Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game, you get to play any hero or villain and rewrite Marvel history.

PLAYABILITY: This is not like *Dungeons & Dragons*' d20 system. It's a brand-new, innovative game that uses plastic counters instead of dice. Since it's a new concept, beginners can't rely on longtime gamers to teach them the ins and outs, but once you've spent time with the rules, they can be mastered in a few hours. Two players can set up quick slugfests, like a Hulk vs. Thor battle royale, while three or more players can play through entire storylines.

COLLECTABILITY: Future hardcover sourcebooks, including an X-Men Guide and Avengers Guide, will be available later in 2003.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST ME: To start playing, pick up the softcover version in *InQuest* #96 or the deluxe hardcover version for $24.99.

■ MIKE SEARLE



BATMAN BATTLES BADDIES IN BRITAIN

As if Batman didn't have enough problems in Gotham City, now he's taking on crime in Manchester, England!

According to published reports, DC's Caped Crusader was spotted in December apprehending five shoplifters outside of a local supermarket without the help of Robin or any of the Bat-family. Despite his best efforts, the thieves refused to admit which of Batman's dastardly Rogues set them up on the grocery heist

When local law enforcement showed up on the scene, Batman, in a rather uncharacteristic move, stuck around and answered any questions or concerns the MPD had. When the police asked who was behind the cowl, Batman shocked slack-jawed onlookers by lifting his mask to reveal himself as 36-year-old Alan Nickerson, the store's security manager, and not millionaire playboy Bruce Wayne as had been previously suspected.

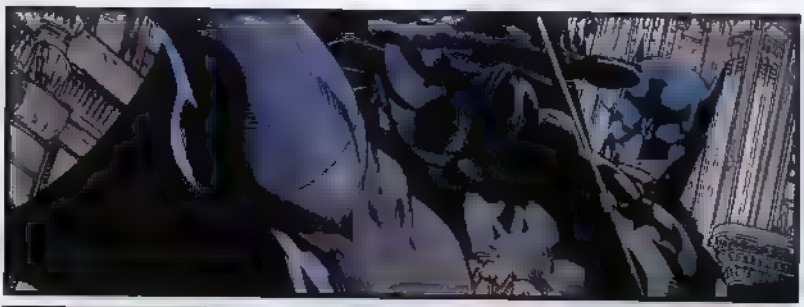
"It was nothing really," Nickerson said. "I'd have done the same, even if I wasn't wearing the Batsuit. Everyone just stopped and looked at me, and even the police were a bit gobsmacked when they arrived to arrest the people I caught."

While residents and law enforcement tried to get to the bottom of what the term "gobsmacked" meant, Nickerson began to explain that he'd only donned the cape and cowl for a charity event, and that he was, in fact, not Gotham City's Batman.

"Batman has always been a hero of mine," admitted Nickerson. "But from now on, it's back to wearing the normal uniform."

However, Batman wasn't the only hero lending a helping hand to the-foul-mouthed Brits that day. A gang of thugs made the horrible mistake of attacking Superman as he attempted to deliver 2,000 British Pounds to a charity for needy children. While Supes handled the thugs with relative ease—all while defending the money—he was later revealed as Gary Davis, a father of five from the town of Rochdale, and not Clark Kent, father of none from Metropolis.

"It didn't really occur to me at the time but I suppose the whole thing looked ridiculous," said Davis. ■ CS



PALISADES
COBRA...THE ENEMY
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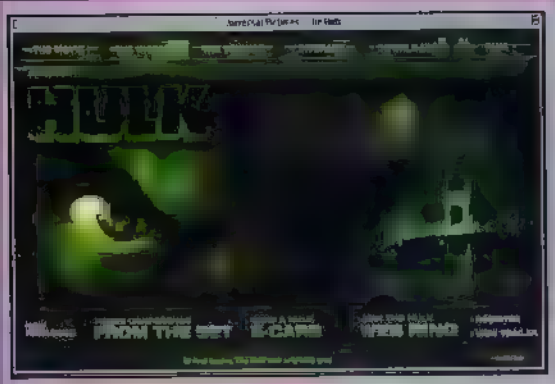
SITE OF THE MONTH



THE OFFICIAL HULK WEBSITE

www.thehulk.com

As the Hulk smashes through his 50th issue this month, make sure to get in on all the Hulk-a-mania at the recently unveiled official movie site. Peek at photos straight from the set, download wallpapers and screensavers or mail your friends a Hulk e-card. Even better than friends, you can fire off a question straight to Mr. Hulk himself, director Ang Lee! Now, if only they'd post Jennifer Connelly's phone number.

FEBRUARY

1 Everyone's favorite redheaded super-spy makes her comic debut this month in *Alias Agent Bristow* #1 from Arcade Comics based on the hit ABC TV show. Awesome Alias fan site: alias.fredfarm.com

12 *Lady Death* #1 CrossGen brings back the Lady in Black with a new look, a big sword, and a bad attitude. Official site: www.crossgen.com If that's not enough resurrections for you, snag *Astro City: Local Heroes* #1 from DC, the first *Astro City* series in over two years! Official site: www.wildstorm.com

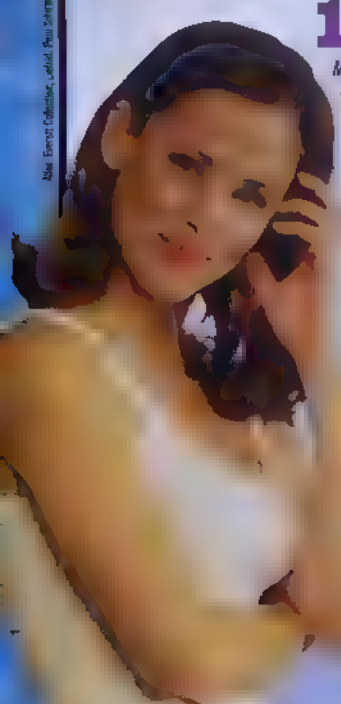
14 Spread the love! Not only is it Valentine's Day, but the release of *Daredevil: The Movie* in theatres across America. Exhaustive DD fan site: www.manwithoutfear.com

19 *Girl Scouts Work Sucks* #1 Image invites you hit the streets with the gals that put creator Jim Mahfood on the map. Official Mahfood site: www.40oz

26 *Hellboy Anthology* #1. John Cassaday, Andi Watson, and other top artists get their shot at Mike Mignola's signature character in this anthology from Dark Horse. Official site: www.hellboy.com

SILLY PLEASURE OF THE MONTH

www.homestarrunner.com



5 QUESTIONS WITH...

ROB LIEFELD

Rob Liefeld can still draw a crowd–and press. Case in point, the upcoming four-issue mini-series *Youngblood: Bloodsport*, where Liefeld teams with *Ultimate X Men* scribe Mark Millar in a story that will revamp the character Liefeld created a decade ago. One of comics' most controversial personalities, *Wizard* discussed what Liefeld labels his "final comic project."

Youngblood: Bloodsport was scheduled to come out last fall. Will we see it in 2003?

Yes. I caught a bad case of stage fright three-fourths of the way through, freaked out and started going back and changing pages. I wish I had been more professional, but the book benefited from the extra attention.

As an original founder, what's your opinion on Image Comics today?

It's such a different company that it's impossible to compare the two eras. From the moment we raced out of the gate, we challenged the Marvel/DC dominance and it's a shame we couldn't work together better to assure that we could sustain the momentum. Image 2003 is just a parking lot of creators producing would-be movie and TV pitches via cheap comics.

Do you regret retiring from comics?

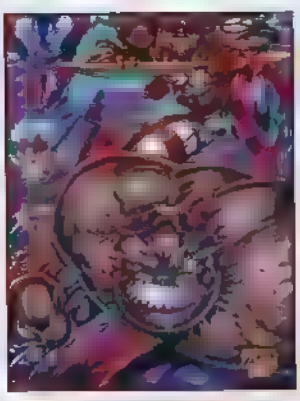
I couldn't be happier. Best decision I ever made. I had my run and stepped away at the appropriate time. Until *Bloodsport*, I hadn't drawn a comic since my four-issue run on *Wolverine*, it felt really good stepping away for two years. I've been blessed with two little boys during that period and I get to spend most of my days playing with them. I wouldn't trade that for anything.

With Jim Lee's success on Batman and Marc Silvestri's upcoming run on New X-Men, would you return to a monthly title?

I have zero desire to pencil comics for anyone else. There was a period when my father was ill, before he passed away, that it was a comfort to embrace my Marvel past doing stints on *Cable* and *Wolverine*, but that's no longer the case. I really enjoy what Jim's doing with Jeph Loeb on *Batman*; they're a great pairing. The Silvestri thing seems forced to me, his original run was not memorable and I'm not looking forward to his return, as I prefer Frank Quitely.

Do you ever talk to any of the other Image co-founders?

I only speak to Todd [McFarlane]. We seemed to make great strides burying the hatchet this past summer. We talked about the past and caught up with each other. Todd was really the only member of the original founders that I would call a friend. Todd was in my wedding, we spent weekends at each other's pads. Even during the most contentious period, I wished him well. Without Todd, Jim and myself, there would be no Image. Todd is now the last pillar of that company as much as they try to position themselves otherwise. The other guys were really just warm bodies, they know it and they're still trying to act as if they're bigger and more important than they are. ■ CS



TV SHOWS WE WANT TO SEE AS COMICS

With "Alias," "CSI" and "The Osbournes" all jumping from TV to their own comic books, *Wizard* decided to run down five more shows we want to see in our local comic book store soon, complete with the creative team we'd like to see on the book.

24

Creative Team: Writer Greg Rucka (*Elektra*) & artist Lee Bermejo (*Batman/Deathblow*)

CIA anti-terrorism specialist Jack Bauer's stopped an assassination attempt and is currently trying to find a nuclear bomb under terrorist control in Los Angeles but in *24* the comic, Jack would be taken off the defensive and put on the offensive as he's assigned to assassinate a high-level foreign diplomat who's visiting Los Angeles for only 24 hours.

THE SHIELD

Creative Team: Writer Brian Azzarello (*100 Bullets*) & artist Leo Fernandez (*Queen & Country*)

Rogue cop Vince Mackey step over the line in the first season of "The Shield" as he killed a fellow cop and took payoffs from all sides. But in *The Shield* comic, he goes even further as he plans a drug war between the biggest gangs in Los Angeles' Farmington District so he can play both sides against the middle and reap all the rewards.

TWILIGHT ZONE

Creative Team: Rotating

Okay sure, the new "Twilight Zone" hosted by Forest Whitaker, sucks ass, but imagine tales of horror and suspense as told by comic book greats such as Grant Morrison (*New X-Men*), Alan Moore (*Watchmen*) or J. Michael Straczynski (*Amazing Spider-Man*) and illustrated by artists like Richard Corben (*Banner*) or Rick Veitch (*Swamp Thing*).

SOUTH PARK

Creative Team: Writer Alan Moore (*Tom Strong*) and artist Chris Ware (*Acme Novelty*)

A huge "South Park" fan, Moore's ability to make the absurd and fantastic seem normal would be put to good use in *South Park* the comic book. Talking gorillas, satirizing American culture and raising characters from the dead are all old hat to Moore, so a comic featuring Stan, Kyle, Cartman, Tweet and maybe even Kenny would be a perfect fit.

SURVIVOR

Creative Team: Writer Garth Ennis (*Punisher*) & artist Steve Dillon (*Punisher*)

Sure, it's a game show full of beautiful people on CBS, but under Ennis and Dillon, our *Survivor* would feature 12 random contestants left on an island to fight–to the death! The last survivor moves on to the next round–in Africa, where he or she must fight lions, apes and even the dreaded anaconda! ■ **MC**

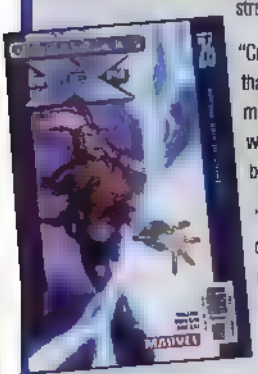
CONTROVERSY OF THE MONTH

MARVEL'S NEW ULTIMATE LINE COVER STOCK

If you've picked up any Ultimate title since December, you've probably already noticed Marvel's new, ultra-thin, glossy cover stock. While the new shiny covers may look nice and hold down pricing, most fans ain't happy with them. Marvel had no official comment, but most fans see the new cover stock as a cost-cutting measure, which usually has its Ultimate books sporting tough, cardstock covers. Here's just a small sample of what fans online are saying about the covers.

"When people criticize comics as being 'pamphlets,' you don't want to reinforce that by publishing something that feels as thin as one."

"What was wrong with the other covers? They sell enough of these books. No need to downgrade. The Ultimate covers were the nicest quality of all the mainstream monthly comics."



"Customers want lowered prices. Fans complain that they don't want any gimmick covers. Marvel met them on both issues. These should be lighter when shipping as well. I'm not saying I like them, but they are functional."

"It's certainly slick, as in slippery, and makes the comic feel more insubstantial, even though the page count remains the same. I think anything, apart from a diminution of story pages, that keeps prices where they are, is a good thing."

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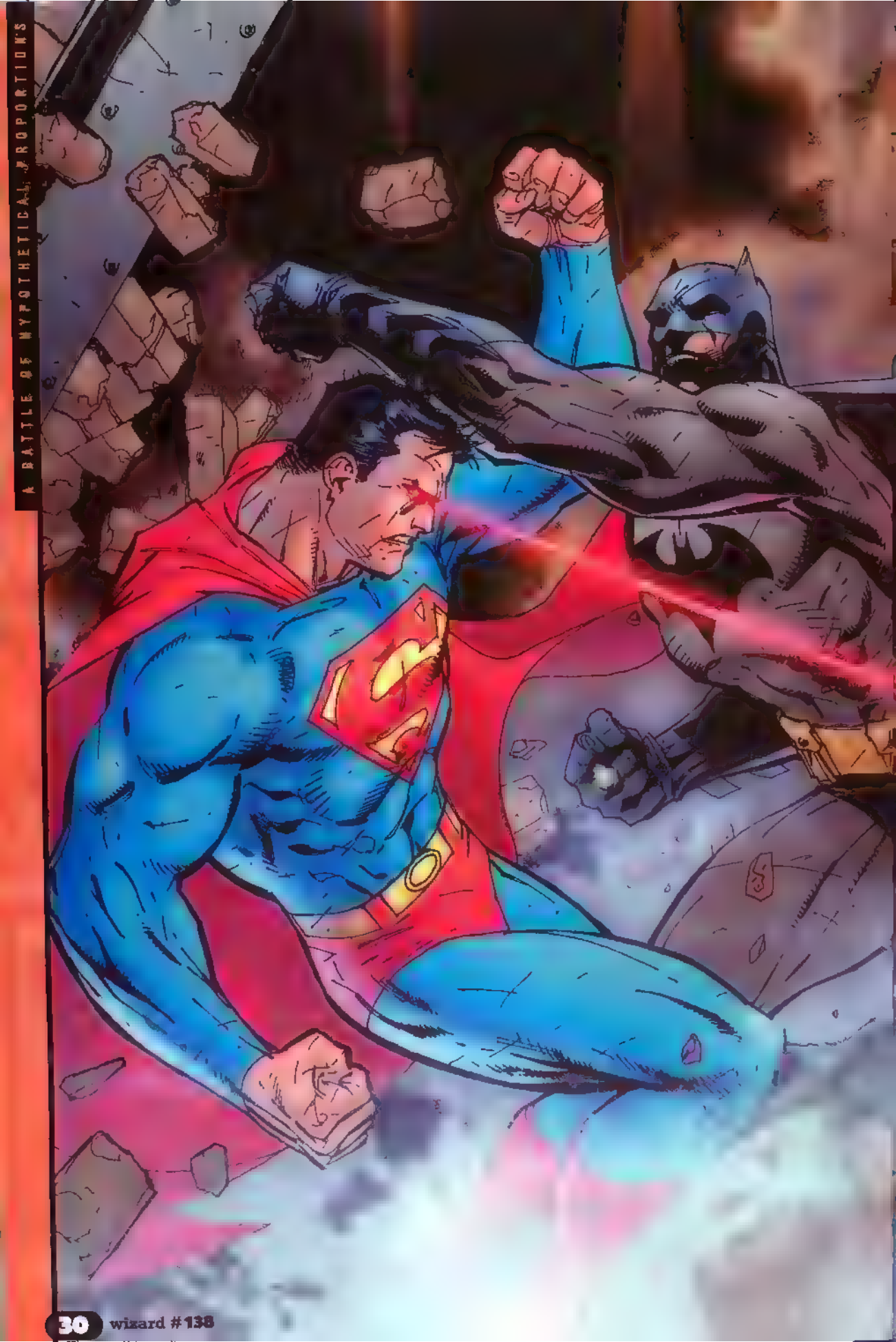


LAST MAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

SUPERMAN VS. BATMAN

THE BATTLE ...is a little different this month! We didn't wanna spoil Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's big Batman/Superman showdown in *Batman* #612 (on sale Feb. 26!), but we did wanna give you a preview of what to expect! So we polled a bunch of the top creators in comics and got their take on this titanic tussle: Who wins in a fight between Batman and Superman? Enjoy, fanboys and girls!

GEOFF JOHNS (writer of *Avengers, JSA, Hawkman* and *Flash*) "Depends what the title of the book is. I suspect Batman will win in *Batman*."

PHIL JIMENEZ (artist on *New X-Men*) "Despite protests, I'm of the belief that Superman would generally win in a fight against Batman, simply because Superman can move at nearly the speed of light. No matter how fast Batman may be, no matter how many tricks he has up his sleeve—Superman could disable the Dark Knight faster than he could think in any number of ways. When you're battling a man that can move planetary bodies and move almost 186,000 miles a second, you need more than a computer-like mind and some martial arts tricks. But then, there's always Kryptonite."

MARK WAID (writer of *Fantastic Four, Superman: Birthright*) "Superman. I say this not only because I truly believe a man who has heat vision is pretty unconquerable, but because I'm just sick and tired of seeing Batman kick the snot out of Superman."

JOE KELLY (writer of *Action Comics, JLA*) "To me, it depends on how far things are going to go. If we're talking about a knockdown fight that ultimately is NOT going to be to the death, then I think Batman wins, because he'll always keep scrapping, and Superman will eventually back off to fight another day. HOWEVER, if something so AWFUL ever happened that Superman and Batman got into a fight to the death...Superman wins in less than half a second. He disintegrates Batman from a mile up, knowing that he cannot give that guy a moment to gather his forces. For things to ever be that bad, you have to assume that Superman has crossed a line and would just get it over with."

KURT BUSIEK (writer of *Astro City*) "Logically? Superman's got all the powers. He can move faster than Batman can think. No matter what Batman could whip out of his utility belt or call in via Oracle, Superman can have him flat on his back, unconscious in the gutter before he can get those arm muscles to move or get that command out. Logically, it's Superman all the way. But dramatically? It's more fun to see the impossible victory than the easy win. So I'd be on Batman's side, rooting for brains to overcome power."

JOE QUESADA (Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics) "The fans."

this month's battle drawn by JIM LEE

WANNA FIND OUT WHO WINS? PICK UP BATMAN #612, ON SALE FEB 26!

NATURAL ENEMIES

G-Force's birdlike commandos collide with the Thundercats in an '80s nostalgia crossover of intergalactic proportions

By Richard Ho

Cats and birds don't get along–especially when a Sonic Boomerang and the Sword of Omens are involved.

But this April, the threatened destruction of Thundera will bring natural enemies together for the very first time as '80s icons *Battle of the Planets* and *Thundercats* star in a crossover collision, courtesy of Top Cow and DC. The G-Force kids mix it up with Lion-O and company in a pair of 40-page one-shots with wraparound covers by Alex Ross.

Top Cow's end of this dream team-up comes to life with regular *BotP* writer Munier Sharrieff and UDON Studios penciller Alvin Lee.

"I just thought, if I were a fan, what would I want to see?" asks Sharrieff. Before long, he cooked up a story in which G-Force answers a distress call from Thundera, which is threatened by G-Force nemeses Spectra. "They're drilling for Thundrium, and it's screwing up the planet. They're puncturing the core, and it's screwing up the weather. So Thundera's a wasteland, and G-Force joins the fray."

Sharrieff approached the obligatory fight (which you'll see within the next several pages) carefully. "I tried to do it in a realistic way," he says. "There's a cool meeting between the two main villains, Zoltar and Mumm-Ra."

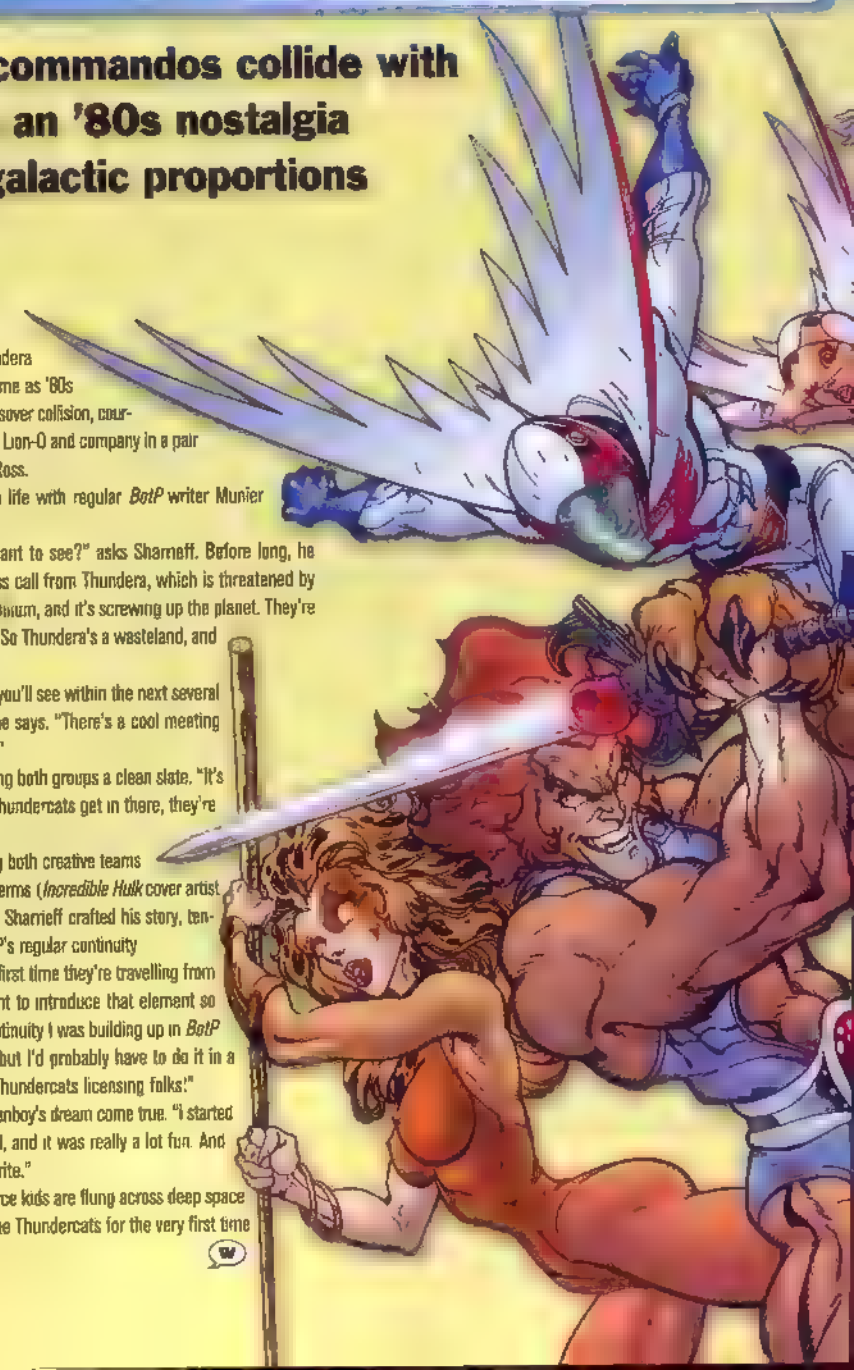
Sharrieff admits he tried not to play favorites, giving both groups a clean slate. "It's definitely a Battle of the Planets book, but once the Thundercats get in there, they're not guest stars. They definitely share center stage."

The two books will be completely separate, leaving both creative teams free to play with their childhood favorites on their own terms (*Incredible Hulk* cover artist Kaare Andrews will write and draw the DC book). Still, Sharrieff crafted his story, tentatively titled "Allied Forces," within the bounds of BotP's regular continuity.

"This is G-Force's first intergalactic mission, the first time they're travelling from Earth to outer space," reveals Sharrieff. "I didn't want to introduce that element so soon, so I had to do it in a way that could fit in the continuity I was building up in *BotP*. I'd even like to refer to it in future issues if I could, but I'd probably have to do it in a way that wouldn't be getting us in trouble with the Thundercats licensing folks!"

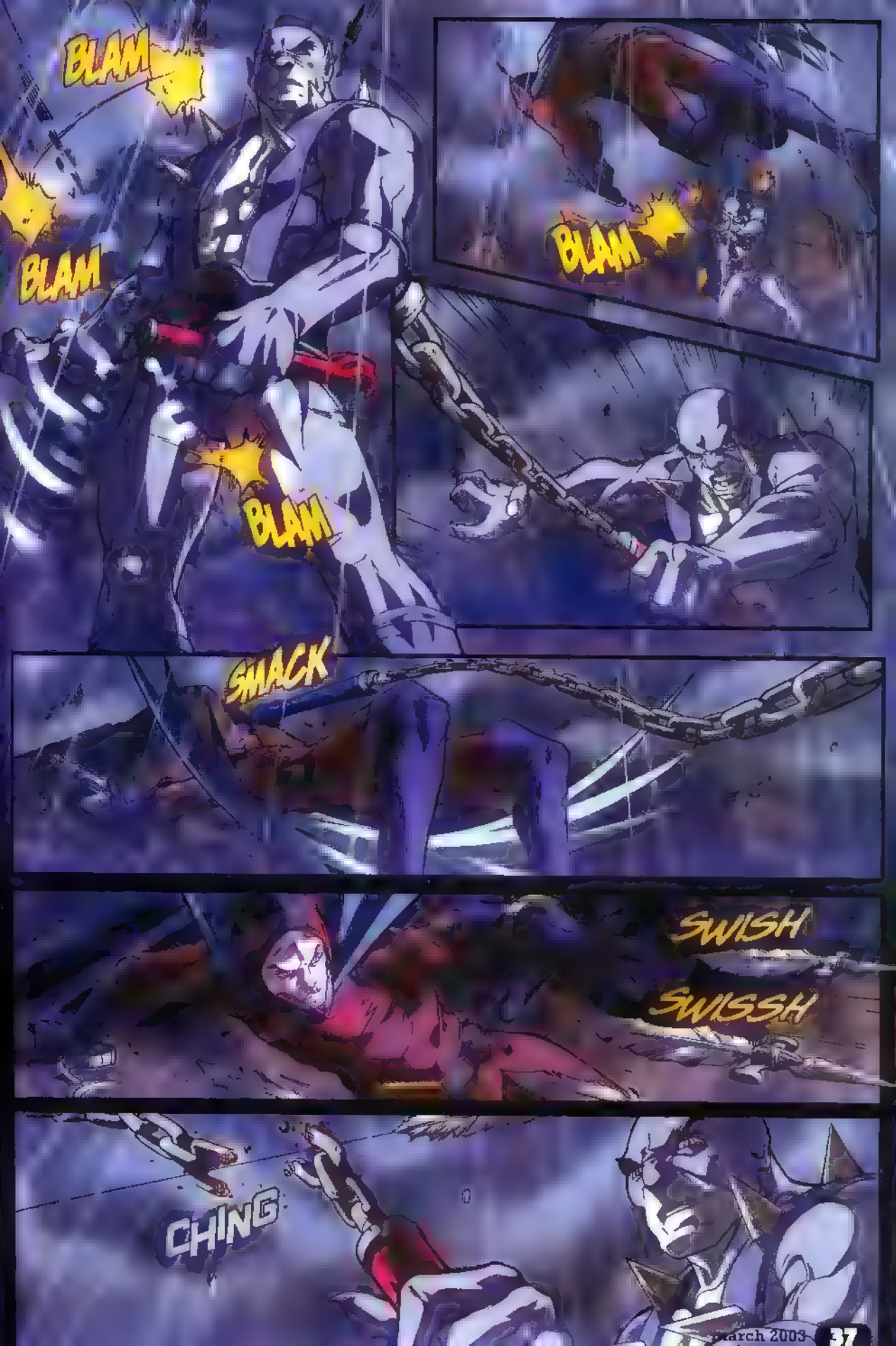
In the meantime, Sharrieff basks in the glow of a fanboy's dream come true. "I started remembering old episodes and how everybody talked, and it was really a lot fun. And the fight between Lion-O and Mark was a blast to write."

Don't believe him? See for yourself, as the G-Force kids are flung across deep space in response to Thundera's distress call and run into the Thundercats for the very first time in this exclusive seven-page preview!



THEY'VE COME BACK TO FINISH US OFF! WE GOTTA HIT THEM FIRST!
BOOM
WEAPONS ARE HURLED BEFORE GREETINGS AND EXPLANATIONS CAN BE UTTERED.
TRUE INTENTIONS ARE LOST IN THE HOWL OF GALE-FORCE WINDS AND THE DARK SUCKNESS OF TORRENTIAL RAIN.
ASSUMPTIONS ARE MADE IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT...
...AND BATTLE HONED SKILLS, ALONG WITH PREDATORY INSTINCTS, TAKE OVER.
NEEDLESS TO SAY, A BATTLE ENSUES.

SWOOOSH
SMACK
BOOOM


BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
SMACK
SWISH
SWISSH
CHING

WHAM
SMACK SMACK
SMACK SMACK
SWOOSH
OH, GREAT...

...HE'S UP AND GONE KING CONAN ON ME.
IT IS CALLED THE SWORD OF OMENS. BELIEVED BY MANY TO BE THE MOST FORMIDABLE WEAPON EVER FORGED.
IT IS WIELDED BY A BEING WHO'S MASTERED SWORDSMANSHIP AT THE TENDER AGE WHEN MOST CHILDREN WERE TRYING TO MASTER SPEECH.
HIS NAME IS LION-O.
SHUMP
HIS OPPONENT, MARK, HOWEVER, IS NO STRANGER TO A CHILDHOOD FILLED WITH INTENSE MILITARY REGIMEN.
OKAY, PAL— WHAT'S IT GONNA BE?
YOU GIVING ME A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN OR ARE WE GEARING UP FOR ROUND TWO?
WHAT MAKES THE SWORD OF OMENS SUCH A FEARED WEAPON IS NOT MERELY ITS INDESTRUCTIBLE LASER SHARP BLADE, BUT ITS JEWELED HILT.

FOR HERE, THE MOST POWERFUL, SENTIENT LIFE GEM IN THE KNOWN UNIVERSE IS HOUSED. THE ALL-KNOWING, ALL-SEEING EYE OF THUNDERA.

USING THE SWORD'S BLADE AS A CONDUIT, THE EYE SEES ALL THERE IS TO KNOW OF G-FORCE'S FEARLESS YOUNG LEADER. AND IN A BLAZING INSTANT, THE EYE CHANNELS THESE EXPERIENCES DIRECTLY INTO LION-O'S MIND.

Art Director: ALEX ROSS
Writer: MUNIER SHARRIEFF Pencils: ALVIN LEE
Inks: ROB THOMAS Colors: TheRealT! WITH KEN SIU CHONG & ERIK KO
Letters: DREAMER DESIGN's ROBIN SEPHAR & DENNIS HEISLER
Editor: DAVID WOHL Managing Editor: RENAE GEERLINGS
Associate Editor: SCOTT TUCKER

LOOK ITT!
CHECK OUT THE REST ON SALE NOW!

INCOMING CALL

Chuck Austen calls attention to real heroes in the ongoing installment of Marvel's 'CALL OF DUTY' series.....By Richard Ho

FOR THOSE WONDERING WHAT SCARES CHUCK AUSTEN, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE COMICS HE WRITES.

"Stephen King says that whatever scares him is what winds up in his books, and it's the same way with me," explains Austen, whose search for inspiration in a post-9-11 world goes no further than the daily headlines. "I have two children, a wife and a home in Los Angeles, one of terrorism's premier targets. If something scares me, I try to deal with it and control it the best I can, in my creativity."

Enter *The Call*, a monthly series from Marvel debuting in April. Austen and penciller Pat Olliffe (*Spider-Girl*) pick up the story that Austen began with *The Brotherhood*, the first of three *Call of Duty* mini-series published in 2002. Much like the mini-series, the ongoing details the everyday heroism of policemen, firefighters and EMTs, mixing a grim, realistic "street" tone with a touch of comic book fantasy. What sort of fantasy? Try an army of flaming zombies and a time-travelling girl who mysteriously appears to warn our heroes of terror to come.

Only a day or two has passed since the events of *The Brotherhood* #6, in which the criminal mastermind and drug lord Jeriah Halidon destroyed the Knox Building in New York. "It explains what happens to all of the other characters right after the building collapses," reveals Austen. "Everyone who is involved with the Knox becomes affected in some way."

The culprit turns out to be a genetically modified virus spread by the zombies. "Anybody who had direct contact with those zombies starts to change. The cop, the fireman, all those guys who actually touched them are going to start to alter. How they alter and what happens to them is basically what brings them all together."

Many of the characters from the previous three series (which also include *The Wagon* and *The Precinct*) return, including policeman Frank Gunzer, EMT Jennifer Montez and a formerly minor character who begins to take on a much larger role—the homeless woman seen in the following preview.

Despite the patriotic themes that played such a vital role in the creation of the series, Austen urges readers to keep the book in perspective. In other words, *The Call* ain't propaganda for the Office of Homeland Security.

"We need to remember that this is not intended to be an anti-terrorist tract, or a message for people to wake up and smell the coffee," warns Austen. "This is fantasy entertainment. It will definitely touch on themes that have great importance and significance to people as the story goes along, but for the most part, our mandate is to tell interesting stories with interesting characters that make people care. Hopefully, we wind up transcending the origins of what it was that led to the series in the first place."

And now, turn your attention to the following six pages, because it's your turn to answer *The Call*!

Do you know who I am?
CHUCK AUSTEN: WRITER
PAT OLLIFFE: PENCILS
JOHN LIVESAY: INKS
CHRIS SOTOMAYOR: COLORS
RANDY GENTILE: LETTERS
BRIAN SMITH: EDITOR
RALPH MACCHIO: CONSULTING EDITOR
JOE QUESADA: EDITOR IN CHIEF
BILL JEMAS: PRESIDENT

Of course I know who he is-- What does he think I am stupid?
I...
No.
I have no idea
Then allow me to introduce myself
My name is Jeriah Haldon, and I own this building.
In fact, I own many buildings, including the Knox Building, which burned down this past evening.
I suppose you heard all about that.
I did
Yeah
It was on the news.
It was, yes
--"on the news"
--as you say

But you know because *you* were there
And now that we have established your desire to conceal the truth from me--
--you can understand that I must take measures -
--to *minimize* any deception on your part.
What
--what do you mean?
Wait, *wait!* I didn't *lie!*
I'm telling you the truth!

Do you believe in the inherent goodness of man, my dear?
I do. Yes, God, I do.
I believe in the inherent goodness of man
How truly sad for you.
Take a finger and let's hope her next answer shows deeper wisdom
No, please Dear God, no, don't do this
Not my finger.
Halidon
Don't cut off my finger!

I begin talking fast
Faster than I should.
KNOX
My words run together because of the fear and trembling and pain
It costs me another finger
EMS
ENG
So I force myself to slow down
I tell them I'm a user who came for the free drugs Raidon was offering to any junkie who could make it to the Knox by 9 PM.
But I just missed the giveaway and the fire had started, so I watched from across the street as--
They know I sale
I lose two fingers for that one

I scream for I don't know how long
It's obvious they already know something, and inside I understand I can't afford to guess what they do or don't, so I should tell 'em the truth
There's only a thumb left
But I say I'm an under cover cop 'cause I guess I'm too used to lying, or maybe I'm just stupid
I tell him Narcotics
I'm out to bust his "free addiction" operation.
I had gotten to the Knox on a tip when all hell broke loose
Junkies were suddenly exploding into flames and tryin' to *kill* people, and I had no idea *what* the hell was goin' on, but it was *insane!*
And I pause there for a minute breathing hard
Waiting
My blood leaks out onto the nice, clean table and glues my severed fingers to the icy surface.
My sweat soaks into the suit of the guy holding me and adds to his stink
I hear a siren too damn far away and headin' the wrong direction to do me any good, and Hal don's a statue
Then it dawns on me
He wants me to continue. He doesn't know I lied about my job.
I keep the thumb.

Check out *THE CALL #1* on sale in April!

THE ULTIMATE
SUPE

WIZARD flies to the set of 'Smallville,' which soars to new heights in its second season and proves that a teen Superman with Lex Luthor as his best friend equals success hotter than a yellow sun

By MIKE COTTON

"Lex is having a bad day," muses Michael Rosenbaum, who plays Lex Luthor on The WB's "Smallville," as he pulls on his character's trademark long black overcoat that envelops his lanky frame like a cloak. "Now, watch this."

The cameras begin to role and the shaved-headed actor's eyes narrow as he pulls a $1,200 nine iron out of the backseat of the 2002 silver Lexus SC430 he's often seen driving around Vancouver, British Columbia. Grabbing the iron, as if he's about to drive towards a 120-yard, par-three hole, Rosenbaum smirks before destroying a meter maid's front headlights and grill with devastating blows that do as much damage to the golf club as it does to the car parked behind him.

"Do you know who I am?" shouts the 30-year-old actor before tossing the iron to the male meter maid who just wrote him a ticket for double parking in front of The Talon, a real movie theater that also doubles as the teen hangout on "Smallville," which chronicles the teen years of Clark Kent who's still coming to terms with his emerging superpowers.

"Get a real job," says the actor, eyes bright with power and a smirk brimming with confidence before sliding into his luxury sports car and speeding off.

But Rosenbaum doesn't get far. "How was that?" asks the actor, as he comes to a quick stop just feet away from episode director Craig Zisk, who's directing "Dichotic," which aired on Nov. 19, 2002 and ranked #1 in its time slot in five key demographics including people between the ages of 12-34 and male teens.

"Good, we've got it. Let's move on," says Zisk before another driver gets behind the wheel as Rosenbaum walks back to his trailer.

"Lex is a pretty cool, calm individual and he never lets anything really bother him—not the kind of guy who wears his emotions on his sleeve," admits Rosenbaum as he ditches his coat and greets fellow cast members Kristin Kreuk (Lana Lang) and Sam Jones III. (Pete Ross). "We're giving little glimpses of Lex's darker side. On this particular occasion, he's having *that* bad of a day."

NO SMALL SUCCESS

Bad days haven't been a problem for Rosenbaum or the rest of the cast of "Smallville" though.

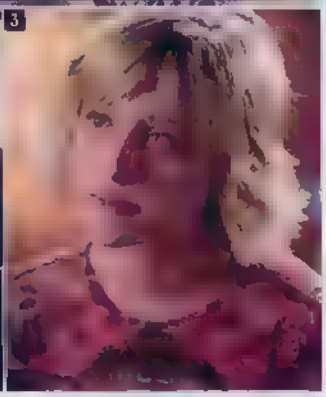
Since it debuted last season with a pilot episode that broke ratings records for The WB, the show's become a Tuesday night hit, even beating out Fox's hit drama "24."

With the overly campy taste of Dean Cain and Teri Hatcher's tepid romance from 1993-1997's "Lois & Clark" still fresh in fanboys' mouths, much of comic-dom braced for another failed attempt at bringing the grandeur of Superman to the small screen. What fans weren't ready for was Miles Millar and Alfred Gough, two guys who didn't know much about Superman—except how to make him a star again.

The duo took the Man of Steel back to his core essence, put him into his teens, made Lex Luthor his best friend and introduced Lana Lang as the hottest girl-next-door since Lolita.

"['Smallville'] was probably the most fully realized version of one of our projects that we've ever had," says Gough. "We didn't want to go in and do a Superman series. This is Clark Kent growing into the man—and the hero—he'll be. Some people have compared the show to [Marvel's Ultimate line.] And that's kind of what we were going for. We wanted a show about the guy Superman was before he was this icon—right now, he's just a high school student."

The basics of Clark Kent's hometown of Smallville were already laid out in Superman comic book lore—his parents, Jonathan and Martha Kent, the girl next door Lana Lang and his best friend Pete Ross. The co-creators spiced up the show by adding in Lex Luthor as a big brother figure for Clark. Making that relationship more complicated, they've made a concerted effort to bring in Lex's controlling father Lionel Luthor as a regular in Season Two.



GOOD FOUNDATION (1) Lex (Michael Rosenbaum) and Clark (Tom Welling); (2) Martha (Annette O'Toole) and Jonathan Kent (John Schneider); (3) Chloe (Allison Mack).

Their friendship serves as a reminder of what Lex will one day evolve into and also illustrates the differences between the Kent and the Luthor families.

Over the first season and a half, Gough and Millar guided "Smallville" into the big time with amazing special effects, an outstanding ensemble cast and the continued development of the love triangle between Tom Welling's Clark, Kreuk's Lana and Lois Lane-like student reporter Chloe Sullivan, played by Allison Mack. But the series' creators haven't done it alone in Season Two. They brought in longtime Superman comic writer Jeph Loeb (*Superman For All Seasons*) as a consulting producer and writer on the series to add the fanboy tweaks taken right from DC Comics continuity that drive hardcore fans wild.

"I was a huge fan of the pilot," says Loeb, who's first fully scripted episode, "Red" introduced personality-altering Red Kryptonite and helped the show pull in 18 million viewers to become The WB's most-watched episode of the season to date. "I saw a very early cut and read the script and thought Al [Gough] and Miles [Millar] had done a wonderful job re-imagining the legend. They had read *Superman For All Seasons* and asked if I would come in [for the second season]."

The response to Loeb's first writing gig on "Smallville" hasn't gone unnoticed; he'll be writing at least one more episode of Season Two. Rumors are even surfacing that fans haven't seen the last of Red K or its effects on Clark

KRISTIN SCIENCE

Think Smallville's Kreuk is the new It Girl? It all adds up.

Now in Clark Kent's [illegible] Kristin Kreuk

The 20-year-old Vancouver native, who plays Lana Lang, will knock off most boys' crazy with her sweet girlish charm. A virtual unknown before "Smallville," Kreuk has become one of the hottest young commodities in Hollywood over the last year. So we should tell you: It's not something she's all that comfortable with.

WIZARD: You were one of *FHM*'s sexiest women of 2002. How does that feel?

KREUK: I don't really pay attention to that kind of stuff. It's not something that's important to me. It's flattering in a way, but it's nothing that you go, when you're 12 years old, "I want to be one of the sexiest girls." You don't do that. You want to be smart; you want to be intelligent. You want to be [illegible] and do something with it, and being sexy really has nothing to do with that.

Is it tough to be Superman's love interest?

I think they had trouble writing [Lana] at the beginning. They didn't know exactly what direction they wanted to go. They wanted her to be perfect and they wanted her to be every guy's ideal girl. And there is no way that she could have been because everyone has different tastes and nobody's perfect. So the hardest part is making her really interesting and believable and flawed.

What's the hardest part of doing a show like "Smallville"?

I think the toughest thing in general is to keep it interesting for yourself and for the audience and keep challenging yourself. The best thing on the show is working with the people. I get to work with [illegible] all just close, really well and we have fun and we respect each other.

But it has to be fun to work with [illegible] Tom Welling [illegible] wacky hijinx...maybe pillow fights?

Honestly think that we just work. I mean we goof around but Michael [Rosenbaum] is the biggest prankster. But the most he does is fart or sometimes he does impersonations during someone's close up. He just goofs around. ■ MC

Kent. Insiders say the new strand of Kryptonite may creep back in from time to time, both this season and in future seasons.

And of course, there's the long-awaited and talked-about cameo by a young Batman that Millar and Gough have been pushing for but has not seen fruition. But if it does happen, Welling says he's all for a World's Finest meeting.

"Why not?" asks the star as he finally arrives on set after a late night of shooting the day before. "I think it would be interesting. I think it would be a fun thing for viewers. I wouldn't mind Bruce Wayne showing up. There is a lot in that character, I'm sure we'd see him in a time when he's trying to figure out who he is and what he's doing and I think that's interesting in any character."

Another hot topic that keeps the show fresh and keeps viewers coming back week after week is the will-they or won't-they high school romance between Clark Kent and Lana Lang. "Smallville" stars and producers know the kiss of death that crucified "Lois & Clark" was when Lois and Clark got together and eventually married.

"[Lana] definitely wants Clark to be honest with her and she has feelings for him," says Kreuk. "That's obvious and [Lana] knows [Clark] has feelings for her. But right now, they sort of become friends first and she has to feel like he trusts her. I don't know where their relationship is going per se, but I think they've got a rocky road ahead of them."

BEST FRIENDS FOREVER?

The hottest relationship on "Smallville" isn't Clark Kent and Lana Lang, though—it's Clark and Lex Luthor.

While fans have been fascinated for over 60 years by the good-versus-evil struggle between Superman and Lex Luthor in the comic books, it's twice as entertaining to view Welling's Kent and Rosenbaum's Luthor not as enemies but as best friends. Rosenbaum wasn't always sure how fans would react to a character most of mainstream culture views as a one-dimensional villain.

"I thought that everybody would hate the character," laments Rosenbaum. "I assumed they'd hate him because they know that he's going to be evil and they're expecting me to be evil. Now they don't know exactly what my motivation is. What am I doing? What are my motives? [Fans] always say that Clark's story is the making of a hero and Lex is the making of an anti-hero."

And according to sources at The WB, Lex and Clark's friendship will get even more complicated after the show's mid-season break. Rumors say Lex and Clark's fathers' relationship comes to a head soon as Pa Kent brandishes a gun that may leave the CEO of LuthorCorp in a coma. And that's not the only relationship changing in Smallville, either.

Pete Ross, Clark's best friend and the only person outside of Clark's immediate family that knows of his metahuman powers, has become a much bigger part of the show this season and fans can expect more of his involvement in upcoming episodes as Clark's sidekick.

"Pete knowing Clark's secret adds so much to the show," says Jones, who plays Ross. "My age and the parents' age, there is a huge difference there. Imagine that in real life: a kid in high school knowing that about his best friend. I can ask the questions that the audience wants to know now, as opposed to the parents. Like if he does something wrong or he super-speeds too fast, the parents are like, 'Don't do that Clark!' With Pete, it's more like, 'Yeah, do it, man.' It's cool because I can use him for my advantage. He's my friend—my cool, strong friend."

"KISS OF DEATH?" (1) Clark and Lana (Kristin Kreuk); (2) Pete Ross (Sam Jones) knows Clark's secret.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

After almost 12 hours on set, friends or not, everyone's ready to go home.

But Rosenbaum's still thinking about how quickly his character Lex went from zero to club-wielding billionaire in under a minute at the beginning of the day's shoot.

"I don't know if [Lex] feels good about what he did, but he kind of got it out of his system. Now he's going to anger management, which is just hilarious," chuckles Rosenbaum as he exits the Canadian street lined with U.S. flags to look more like a small Kansas town. "You can expect a lot from us this year. Talking to the writers, you want to take baby steps to the . . . they call it the dark side. We're not 'Star Wars', but, you know, taking the wrong path. It's going to take a while. There are going to be moments in Lex's life in this season and episodes where you see it. It just gives the audience a better understanding of why he becomes evil, [seeing the] little things along the way."

So, compared to Lex, where's Rosenbaum's road lead him?

"To bed," laughs the actor, waving to Mack and Kreuk as he leaves the set. "I'm going home. It wasn't that tough of a day—I mean for me, not for Lex."

Judging by his own size, stature and manhood, Staff Writer Mike Cotton has his own view of the word "Smallville."

POP QUIZ

So you know everything about "Smallville"? Think again.

Don't worry, this won't affect your final grade.

But if you think you're the biggest "Smallville" fan on the block, you'd better be ready to prove it. Here's a 10-question quiz that'll separate the jocks from the nerds [illegible] look to Lex for the [illegible]

1) [illegible] the name of [illegible] High School's [illegible]
2) What band performs the "Smallville" theme song?
3) What's the current population of [illegible]?
4) What is the [illegible] High School mascot?
5) When Lex Luthor receives a glimpse of his [illegible]
6) [illegible]
7) How many siblings does Pete Ross have?
8) What student [illegible]
9) What magazine's [illegible] destroyed Smallville?
10) [illegible]? MC

THE BIG RISK

With a monster movie sequel looming and the X-Men entering a crucial period, Marvel turns over the keys to its No. 1 franchise to a virtual unknown in the U.S., Japanese sensation Kia Asamiya

By Mike Cotton

Kia Asamiya sat at his drawing table shocked.

Just moments after receiving an offer from Marvel Comics to draw *Uncanny X-Men*, the artist sat dumbfounded at the idea.

Since he was an adolescent and discovered an imported X-Men comic, the 39-year old Japanese comic superstar dreamed of drawing for Marvel Comics, and of illustrating one of his Holy Grails. Now, he was finally getting the chance—and that opportunity terrified him.

"I hesitated for about a second," remembers Asamiya, who began his X-era with December's *Uncanny X-Men* #416. "I was nervous, but I got over it quick initially. Now doing pages though, I get nervous again through every panel I draw."

Asamiya, a meticulous draftsman, initially worried he wouldn't be able to hit Marvel's monthly deadlines, but the more he thought about it, what he really feared was the fan reaction to the drastic change in style from regular *Uncanny X-Men* penciler Ron Garney.

Although Asamiya stands as the most sought-after and successful artist across the Atlantic, he's also a virtual unknown to most American comic books fans.

Asamiya wasn't the only one with concerns.

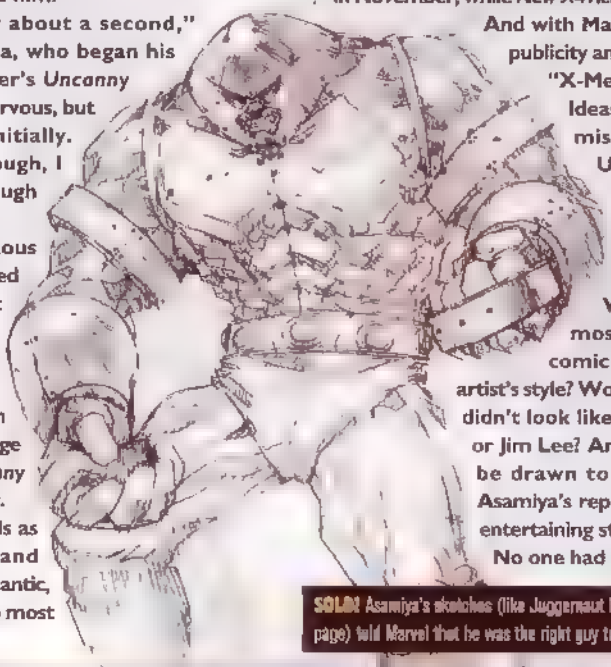
Almost 10,000 miles away, Marvel also felt uncertain that Asamiya's pointy-nosed, doe-eyed style fit the X-Men franchise during a critical time in the mutants' 40-year existence. Over the past few months, the X-titles have fallen from their usual perch atop the Top 100 sellers as *Uncanny* has dropped to #11 in November, while *New X-Men* falls to the #4 slot in November.

And with Marvel's admitted mishandling of publicity and comic book tie-ins for the first "X-Men" film in 2000, The House of Ideas knew there could be no such missteps with May's "X-Men 2."

Unfortunately, that wasn't even close to where the questions ended regarding Asamiya's ability to pull off the necessary magic on Marvel's No. 1 franchise.

Would the X-Men audience—the most mainstream of mainstream comic book fans—accept a Japanese artist's style? Would retailers support a book that didn't look like Frank Quitely, Adam Kubert or Jim Lee? And would American manga fans be drawn to an X-Men book because of Asamiya's reputation as the most vibrant and entertaining story telling in the manga realm?

No one had any answers—except Asamiya.



SOLO! Asamiya's sketches (like Juggernaut here, and Wolverine on next page) told Marvel that he was the right guy to draw *Uncanny X-Men*.

MAKING OF A WINNER

After receiving the e-mail of Asamiya's first X-Men sketches in July of 2002, X-Men editor Mike Marts could only think of three words. He nailed it.

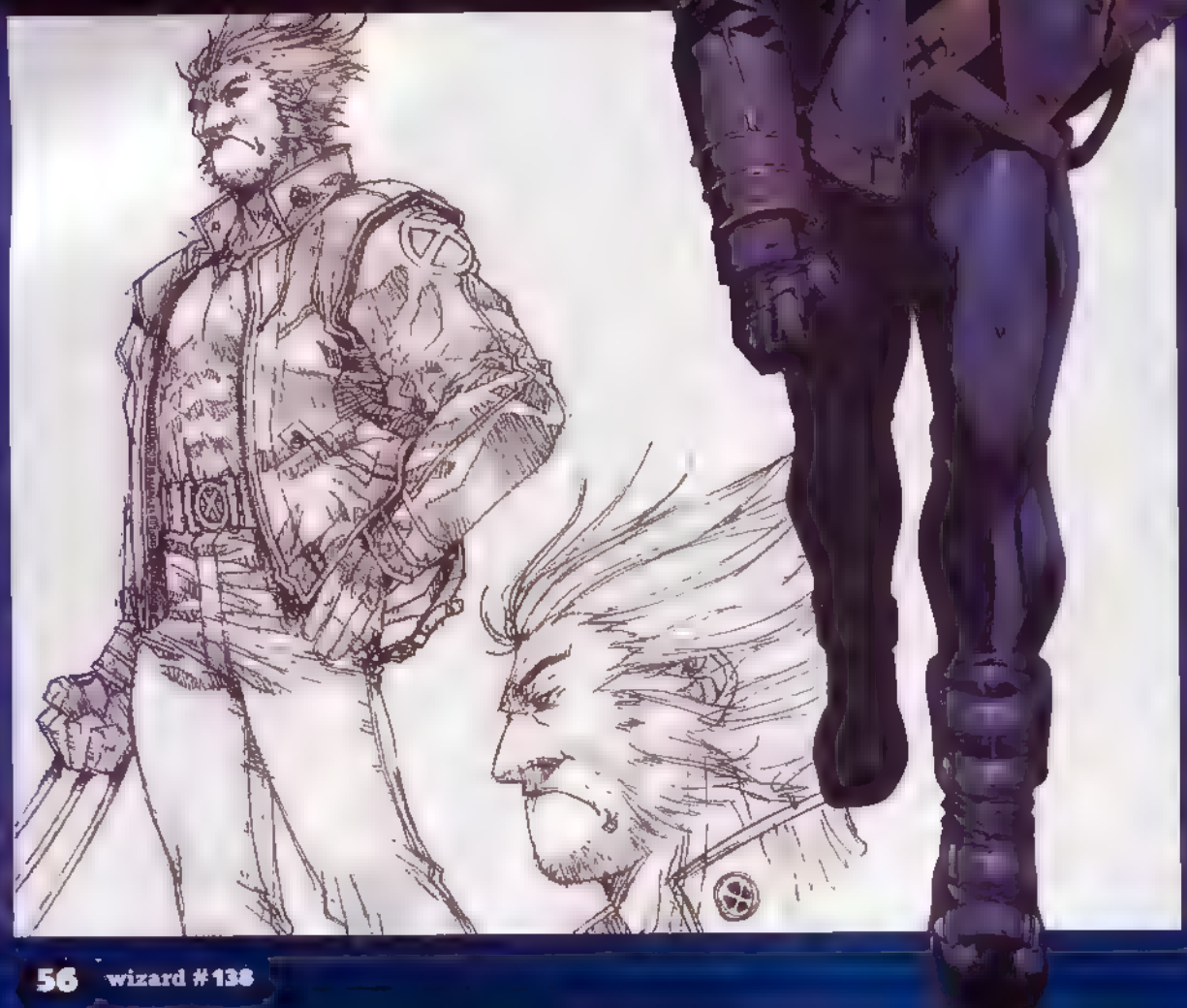
"Kia's sketches were so much more than we were expecting," says Marts of the artist, who took over *Uncanny X-Men* with December's issue #416. "He made every character seem new and fresh. Outside of having Kia make the eyes on a few characters smaller here or do a small costume tweak there, he blew us away with his initial sketches. His Wolverine was perfect, his Juggernaut amazing. He won us over immediately."

Marvel banked on the idea that fans who shunned Asamiya's imported manga such as *Dark Angel* will look at his X-work like they did with another unproven X-Men talent caught Marvel's eye a couple of years ago. Fans latched onto this rookie's manga-esque style and not only transformed him into a superstar, but also sparked an American art revolution. His name? Joe Madureira.

Of course, both X-Men titles sell close to 100,000 issues a month and with a fan base that's lived through disparate art styles from Vertigo-esque, European artists such as Igor Kordey and Sean Phillips, couldn't fans adjust just as easily to Asamiya's more dynamic graphics? Maybe, but with titles such as DC Comics' *Batman*, Dreamwave's *Transformers* and even Marvel's own Ultimate titles pushing *Uncanny X-Men* out of the top ten of Diamond's Top 100 list for the first time in years, some wondered if Asamiya was too far from the mainstream to get the

"I was nervous, but I got over it quick initially. Now doing pages though, I get nervous again through every panel I draw."

—KIA ASAMIYA



OF GREAT IMPORT Marvel hopes the mainstream fans that virtually ignored Asamiya's full-color Dark Angel, imported by Image Comics in 2000, will look favorably on his Uncanny work.

title back to its #1 or #2 position.

But after seeing Asamiya's sketches, Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, agreed with his staff and decided the risk of putting Asamiya on *Uncanny X Men* was well worth the reward of possibly pulling in any of the over 80 million manga fans worldwide.

"Any time we publish any book it's a risk," says Quesada. "But at Marvel we're not afraid of taking those risks. Everything we do here is risky. If you don't risk anything, you become extinct and comics will become one big La Brea tar pit of superheroes."

That didn't stop Marvel from hedging its bets. It plugged three free preview pages of Asamiya's debut issue in all of its November titles to hype its new look.

Even DC Comics knew the risk: it had held off publishing Asamiya's Batman manga project *Batman: Child of Dreams* in the States for almost three years after it was published in Japan for fear fans wouldn't latch onto Asamiya's style. Only after Marvel trumped its new *Uncanny* artist, did DC release *Dreams* in February [see sidebar]

From Quesada's view Marvel's thinking Big Picture. For the House of Ideas, Asamiya's debut wasn't about impressing current X-Men fans as much as it was a way to impress the millions of manga fans, who've never picked up an American comic. What *really* excites him with Asamiya's debut on *Uncanny X-Men* was the chance that American female manga fans might pick up the title if they knew Japan's hottest artist was on the title.

"If you really want to know the secret to reaching female readers, I'll tell you," teases Quesada. "It begins and ends with manga."

CROSSING OVER

Quesada wasn't the only one anticipating Asamiya's stateside debut.

In Japan, where manga comic books stand as one of the top forms of entertainment, the news spread like wildfire through the creative community. Artists were in a frenzy after hearing one of their own would be taking over America's most recognizable comic book franchise (the first X-film, incidentally, did extremely well there)

In fact, many manga mainstays see Asamiya's opportunity at Marvel as one they can capitalize on. (See sidebar on p. 59 for five manga artists primed to cross the Pacific to American comics.)

Of course, working with an artist half a world away, who draws in a different format, and speaks as much English as the average American speaks Japanese. ..it presented its own problems.

First off, Marvel was concerned it had to flip his art, mirror-image-style, since Japanese manga reads right-to-left. Asamiya, amazingly enough, can draw both right-to-left *and* left-to-right.

BAT-MANGA

DC to publish Asamiya's Batman graphic novel

DC and Marvel Comics don't agree on much but they do see eye-to-eye on one subject—Kia Asamiya's talent.

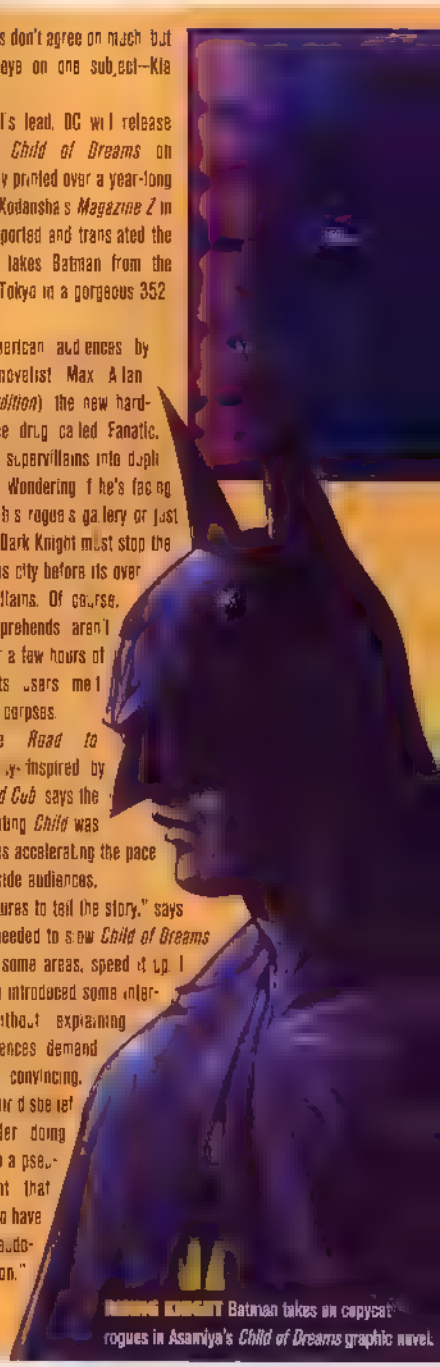
Following Marvel's lead, DC will release Asamiya's *Batman, Child of Dreams* on February 26. Originally printed over a year-long span in the pages of Kodansha's *Magazine Z* in 2000, DC's finally imported and translated the mammoth story that takes Batman from the streets of Gotham to Tokyo in a gorgeous 352 page hardcover.

Adapted for American audiences by heralded mystery novelist Max Allan Collins (*Road to Perdition*) the new hardcover focuses on the drug called Fanatic, which turns would-be supervillains into duplicates of real villains. Wondering if he's facing the real members of his rogues gallery or just cheap imitations, the Dark Knight must stop the flow of Fanatic into his city before it's overrun with would-be villains. Of course, the suspects he apprehends aren't much help since after a few hours of ingesting Fanatic, its users melt down into mummified corpses.

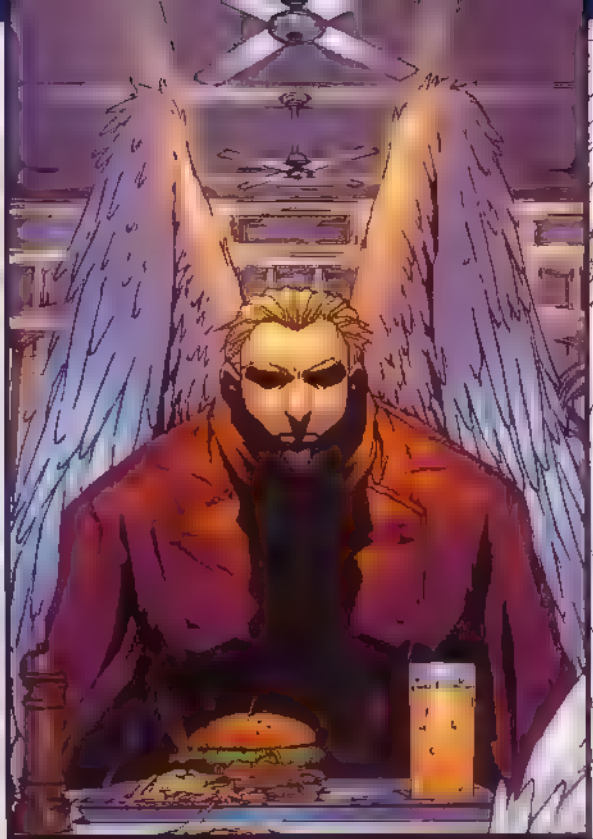
Collins, whose *Road to Perdition* was partially inspired by Japan's *Lone Wolf and Cub* says the toughest part of adapting *Child* was slowing and sometimes accelerating the pace of the story for stateside audiences.

"I prefer the pictures to tell the story," says Collins. "But I felt I needed to slow *Child of Dreams* down a little and in some areas, speed it up. I also felt that Asamiya introduced some interesting concepts without explaining them—American audiences demand a certain amount of convincing. they don't suspend their disbelief without the storyteller doing some arm-twisting. So a pseudo-scientific element that gets tossed in needs to have an accompanying pseudo-scientific explanation."

■ MC



TRUMPED CONCEPT Batman takes on copycat rogues in Asamiya's *Child of Dreams* graphic novel.



"I intend to be on 'Uncanny' as long as they will have me."

—KIA ASAMIYA

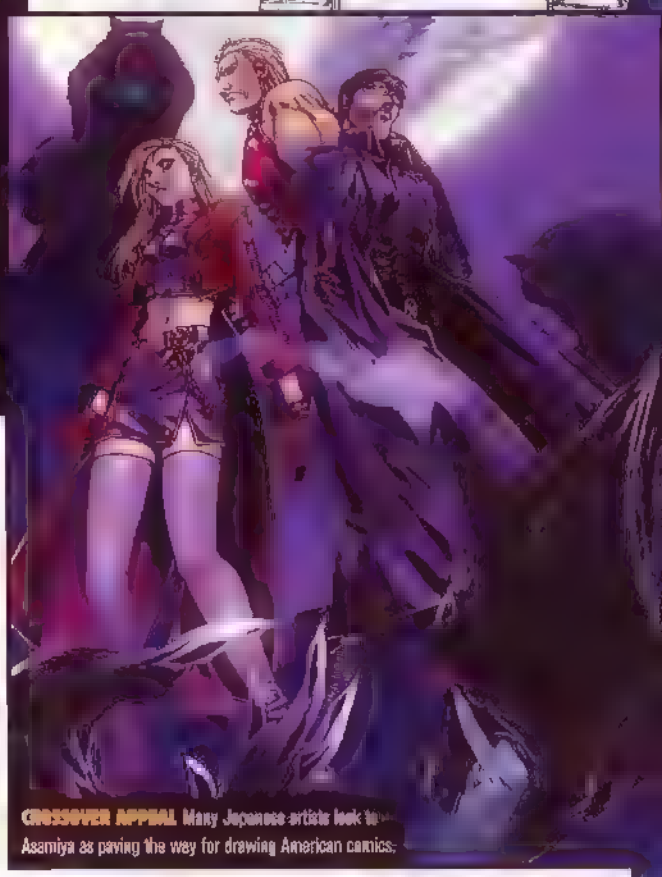
Another concern, all of *Uncanny X-Men* writer Chuck Austen's scripts have to be translated into Japanese for Asamiya, and since no one but new editor C.B. Cebulski—a longtime friend of Asamiya, a stateside talent scout for imported manga—speaks Japanese at Marvel, any corrections or notes from Marts or Austen had to be funneled through Cebulski.

"It's not as bad as you'd think," reveals Marts. "Chuck and Kia actually met at a convention in Toronto and really got along. Usually any changes we have are minor tweaks or maybe Kia wants us to clarify how a scene should look. But, compared to some artists, he's a dream to work with. He's well worth any risk we're taking."

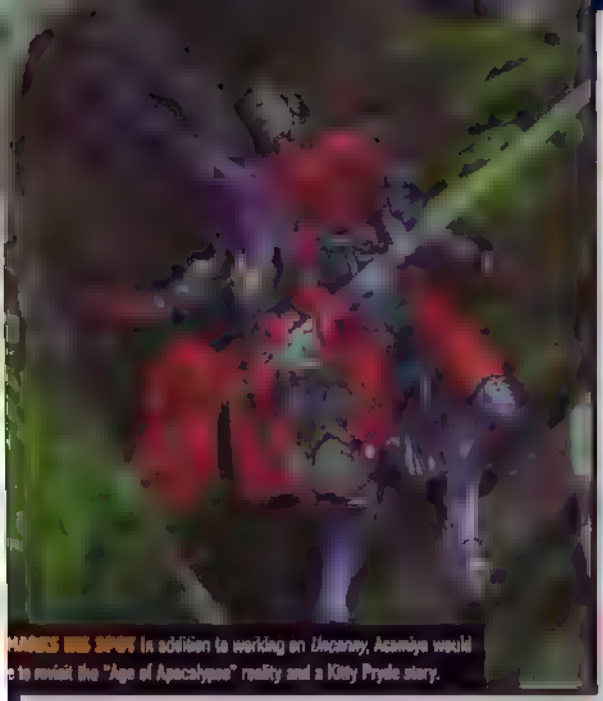
HITTING PAYDIRT

It appears rolling the dice has initially paid off for Marvel.

Orders of *Uncanny X-Men* were up an estimated 6,000 copies



CROSSOVER APPEAL Many Japanese artists look to Asamiya as paving the way for drawing American comics.



MARVEL'S NEW SPIDER In addition to working on *Uncanny*, Asamiya would like to revisit the "Age of Apocalypse" reality and a Kitty Pryde story.

with Asamiya's first issue (up four percent from previous issues.) Even usually cautious retailers are pleased with how well Asamiya's first issue went over with fans.

"His first issue's done much better than previous issues of *Uncanny X-Men* have done recently," says New York City's Midtown Comics manager Gahl Buslov. "A lot of people love the art—visually it looks great and a lot of manga people have come in specifically for that issue. It's drawing a number of extra people. If [a manga artist] fits the bill, it'll increase sales. You can't just slap any manga artist on any title but with the right one, it'll bring some exposure and the difference with the standard fare is very attractive."

That attractiveness to new readers is exactly what Marvel plans to push with it's new Tsunami line, which will see about 75 percent of its titles drawn by manga or manga-influenced artists such as newcomer Adrian Alphona, Udon (*Deadpool*) and Francisco Herrera (*Lone Wolf and Cub 2100*) (See larger Tsunami story on p. 100.)

And with the initial shock of living the dream of drawing the X-Men wearing off, even Asamiya's mildly comfortable enough to risk thinking about the future of his career in American comics.

"I intend to be on *Uncanny* as long as they will have me," gushes Asamiya. "I would love to revisit the 'Age of Apocalypse.' That is one of my favorite X-Men stories. I would also like to do a Kitty Pryde story. Her power could be so visually exciting to draw and hasn't really been done to its fullest yet. I would also love to do a Wolverine solo project someday."

While everyone from Asamiya to Marvel to the over 6,500 U.S. retailers now know *Uncanny X-Men*'s new artist can play in the big leagues, they also know there are still risks ahead—maybe the biggest risk of all.

While an initial bump on *Uncanny* was nice for Marvel, it wasn't the huge boost DC got with Jim Lee on *Batman* or even close to the numbers generated by the recent '80s nostalgia trend. In the end, the bargaining chip to this gamble lies in Asamiya's talent.

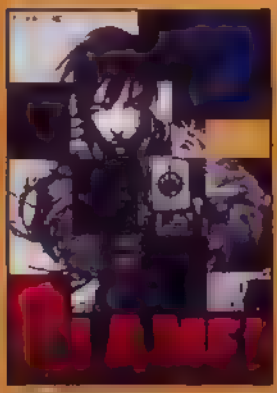
"Kia's proven himself to us," says Marts, as he thumbs through fresh pages from the artist. "Every page looks great. Maybe some fans see it as a risk, but it's not a risk to us, it's just a fact—this guy's good."

Chad Nicholas Gilmore is a Staff Writer. Mike Cotton threatens to quit every day. We're still waiting for it to pay off.

THE NEXT WAVE

Five more Japanese artist set to hit America

With Kia Asamiya's popularity on *Uncanny X-Men* rising, chances are you'll see more Japanese artists working on top American comic book titles. Here's a rundown of the next five superstars primed to take on American work.



◀TSUTOMU NIHEI

The creator of the hit manga series *Blame!* (which steamrolled into an animated series, a live action film and a successful set of toys and statues). He is poised to bring the series to the U.S. next year and will even get his first American gig from Marvel with *Wolverine Off World*.

TAKEHIKO ITO ▶

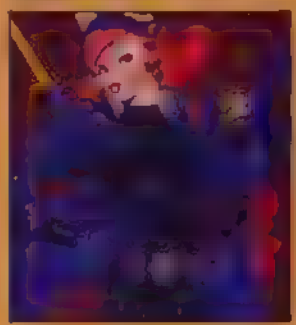
Creator of "Outlaw Star" that's been running on Cartoon Network's "Toonami" recently. He's one of the most well known animators in Japan and plans his first American project, a *Fantastic Four/Silver Surfer* manga project for Marvel in 2003.

◀MIZUKI SAKAKIBARA

A virtual unknown who made her living working on the art for collectable card games. Sakakibara—a writer/artist—was discovered by Marvel during its recent talent search. Sakakibara wrote and illustrated her own X-Men tale, which Marvel felt was so inspired the publisher signed her up immediately for a new *Namor* series in April.

YASUHIRO NIGHTOW ▶

Already a star in the anime world, Nightow's *Trigun* (which will finally be imported to the States this year) gave him a rep as one of the most awe inspiring manga artists ever to put pencil to paper. And with a yen to work on American comics, Marvel has already begun negotiations with him to do covers.



◀KATSUYA TERADA

Huge in Japan. Terada's art books and designs for the video game *Virtua Fighter* have influenced artists such as Joe Madureira (*Battle Chasers*) and Ed McGuinness (*Superman*). He's set his sights on American comics in '03.

HELLBOY MEETS WORLD

With 2003 looming as a banner year for Hellboy, WIZARD conjures up 666 things you need to know about Mike Mignola's harbinger of the apocalypse ■

TWELVE YEARS AGO, MIKE MIGNOLA SOLD HIS SOUL TO THE DEVIL—AND HE HASN'T LOOKED BACK.

Back in 1991, Mignola drew a monster-themed cover for a convention booklet. As a last-minute touch, he added the phrase "Hellboy" on the belt buckle, which provided the artist with a hearty chuckle—and the germ of an idea.

A few years later, while working on a Batman ghost story in 1992, Mignola liked the vibe of the tale and felt that represented the kind of stories he wanted to pursue in a creator-owned project. All he needed was a character to build the stories around and...*voila!*...that initial demonic drawing (shown at right) became the cult phenomenon called Hellboy.

A decade later, Hellboy's evolved from those humble beginnings to become the comic property to watch out for in 2003. This year marks a dramatic upswing in Hellboy's visibility, as a number of high-profile projects are slated for release (see sidebar).

But the biggest notch in Hellboy's horns has got to be his impending big-budget feature film, to be directed by noted horror helmer Guillermo del Toro ("Mimic," "Blade 2"). Del Toro and company head to Prague in March to begin filming for the flick, which is slated to hit screens sometime in 2004.

"I don't know how to prepare [for the upcoming mass exposure]," notes Mignola. "You say, 'Well, a few people know who Hellboy is now, but in a couple of years, there will be bus posters.' It's a very strange period to sit back and say, 'I have no idea what the hell is going to happen.'"

We, however, know what *has* happened, but for those not in the know, here's a little "Hellboy 101": Hellboy's the Demon of the Apocalypse, summoned to Earth by the Nazis during World War II to give Hitler a super-mystical weapon with which he could achieve victory. Hellboy instead wound up in the care of the Allied forces, and eventually, the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense (B.P.R.D.), where he's been working as the world's greatest paranormal investigator for the last 60 years.

Keeping that background in mind, *Wizard* has summoned shades from beyond this mortal plane to give you 666 reasons why you should pay more attention to Hellboy—and discover why this lovable, blue-collar hero is about to emerge from the shadows and step right into the spotlight.

#1) [redacted]

The 2004 film, starring Ron Perlman ("Blade II") and Selma Blair ("Legally Blonde"), closely follows Hellboy's origin laid out in the *Seed of Destruction* story, which sees him summoned from Hell by Nazis but ultimately becoming a good guy.

"We set up the mythology of the characters, and I was very delicate in doing that," explains del Toro. "I was very detail-oriented, because I'm a fan. That makes it tough. As a fan, you want to cram everything from the comic into the screenplay. And you have to be more discerning than that. It was *painful*, because I was a kid in a candy store. I wanted *everything*!"

#6) [redacted]

Want an unpaid testimonial on why you should read Hellboy? How about this ditty from one of the best writers in comics,

Alan Moore (*League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*): Mignola's Hellboy work is "a gem, one of considerable size and luster... Hellboy is a passport to a corner of funnybook heaven you never want to leave."

#13) MYTH ADVENTURES

Mignola bases most of Hellboy's adventures on real folklore and mythology from stories he has read over the years, such as the Irish Jenny Greenteeth myth he used for his story "The Corpse" and the African folklore he used for his "The Island" two-parter. In fact, Mignola boasts, "I've got more Hellboy stories lined up than I'm ever going to live long enough to do."

#15) FATHER KNOWS BEST

Hellboy's blue-collar attitude comes from a rather unlikely source: Mignola's dad! "A lot of Hellboy is my dad. .a working stiff guy. He worked in a woodshop, and he'd come home and he'd always have these horrible cuts and scrapes. He doesn't get fazed by a guy shooting a nail through his own thumb. He just pulls it out with a claw hammer. I wanted Hellboy to be the same way—a Joe Average guy whose job it is to beat the crap out of monsters."

#26) NAZIS—I HATE THESE GUYS!

Whether it's giant cybernetic gorillas, mad scientists like Prof. Oeming and Prof. Kroenen, ice queens like Ilsa Hapstein or Laura Karnstein or disembodied heads floating in a jar of green goo (Von Klept), Nazis drive Hellboy crazy. He hates 'em and he wants to smash 'em all. And, honestly, can you really blame him?

#29) FIST OF FURY

Whether he's thwarting Nazis or dispatching monsters, Hellboy relies on his giant right hand, a.k.a. the Right Hand of Doom, to crack some bad-guy skulls. The hand is completely indestructible, but if Hellboy were killed and the hand was removed, it could be used as the ultimate weapon against humanity.

#35) MONSTER MASH!

Mignola's new takes on classic monsters are enough to leave "X-Files" Agents Mulder and Scully curled up on the floor in a fetal position and crying for their mommies. For example, William Grenier, his werewolf in "The Wolves of St. August" story, doesn't transform from man into wolf; he's a giant wolf creature who wears human skin (which he has no problem shedding to attack Hellboy!). And his terrifying Lovecraftian creations—like the Ogdru Jahad ("Seven Who Are One") which will come to Earth and reduce it to a burning cinder, and his frog monsters with paralyzing tongues (making them popular with the ladies) look as if they were summoned from the psyches of 1,000 mental patients.

#257 Guys like Lobster Johnson (center) and Roger the Homunculous (bottom) pitch in for Hellboy.

#52) MIGNOLA: THE ARTIST'S ARTIST

The number of Mike Mignola admirers in the comic industry could fill a brand-new Circle of Hell

So many creators look up to Mignola and consider him an influence on their work that the 42-year old, New York-based husband and father of one has been called "The Artist's Artist."

As Guillermo del Toro says of Mignola in his introduction to the *Hellboy: Conqueror Worm* trade paperback, "There are moments of quiet, almost elegiac horror juxtaposed with a kinetic energy only hinted at by the

best of [Jack] Kirby. And then—and then—above all!—an irritating simplicity."

"Mike thinks differently than most creators," says *Captain America* artist John Cassaday (whose spin on Hellboy can be seen at right). "His style hits you in the gut. You can tell it's Mignola from a mile away. The simplicity is just genius."

And just look at the lineup of talent assembled for this year's *Hellboy: Weird Tales* anthology book and *B.P.R.D.* one-shots. On *Weird Tales*, you've got the likes of Cassaday, Andi Watson (*Dumped*), Leinil Francis Yu (*New X-Men*) and Alex Maleev (*Daredevil*) providing work on the bimonthly title, issue #1 of which ships Feb. 26. Then in May, the first *B.P.R.D.* one-shot, by *Powers* artist Michael Avon Oeming and Miles Gunter, ships, followed by subsequent stories by tentatively planned creators Brian Augustyn and Guy Davis, Joe Harris and Adam Pollina, and the *Flash* creative team of Geoff Johns and Scott Kolins.

#69) HOT CHICK

There's no shortage of sex appeal in Hellboy's world thanks to the fiery Liz Sherman, a troubled young woman with one minor problem: It burns when she pees (or does anything else!). She's a pyrokinetic, able to create flames and scorching heat with her mind. And in the *B.P.R.D.: Hollow Earth* mini-series, she runs around without pants through most of issue #3. Now imagine that visual with Selma Blair playing the part. Just do it in private.

#86) GONNA KICK IT ROOT DOWN!

According to del Toro, the key to a successful "Hellboy" film "is keeping Hellboy close to his comic roots. Mike created a blue-collar demon, a working stiff. This thing came from another dimension to destroy the world, but he really just wants to relax and have a beer."

#147) CZECH YOUR HEAD

The "Hellboy" movie gets underway in February when the production begins shooting in Prague, which also provided creepy location sets for "From Hell" and the upcoming "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen." Mignola will be on hand as a consultant during the shoot for the $60-million action/adventure/horror flick.

"I was in L.A. for two and a half months doing pre-production, just design and working on the script, putting my two cents in on everything," says Mignola. "Now they're lining up casting and all that kind of stuff, but when they start shooting, I'll be on set. I don't know what the hell I'll be doing, but they want me there, so I'll be there."

#301 Creatures like Ualac here confound Satan's son in every adventure.

HELLBOY: WEIRD TALES #1 COVER BY JOHN CASSADAY

MORE HELL TO COME

2003's going to be one hell of a good year for Mike Mignola and Hellboy. Check out upcoming Hellboy projects stepping this year!

[illegible] (March 26) This 200-page hardcover tome explores the origins and evolution of Mignola's signature creation. Featuring 10 years worth of unpublished art, unused and unfinished covers and loads of sketchbook material, *The Art of Hellboy* serves up the ultimate insider's guide to Mignola's Hellboy Universe.

[illegible] (Feb. 26) Some of comics' finest combine their talents to present their take on Hellboy in this bimonthly, eight-issue mini-series. In issue #1, look for stories from John Cassaday (*Captain America*), Fabiano Nicieza (*Thunderbolts*) and TyRuben Ellingson, who did design work on the "Hellboy" movie with Mignola. "One thing about Hellboy, for some reason, other artists seem to love it," notes Mignola. "We thought there's no better time to do this." Future contributors include P. Craig Russell (*Sandman*), Leinil Francis Yu (*New X-Men*) and Alex Maleev (*Daredevil*), among others.

[illegible] (May and beyond) *Powers* artist Michael Avon Oeming and writer Miles Gunter team up to produce the first B.P.R.D. one-shot, which will feature the supporting cast from Hellboy's world—namely Abe Sapien, Liz Sherman, Johann Krauss and Roger the Homunculus—and will be closely tied to ongoing Hellboy continuity. "I have a lot more of an editorial hand in these because they have to jibe with what's been done in *Hellboy* and what's been done in the previous *B.P.R.D.* mini-series. I'm not actually writing them, but I am kind of overseeing them, making suggestions and things like that." Brian Augustyn (*Out There*) and Guy Davis (*Sandman Mystery Theatre*), and the *Flash* creative team of Geoff Johns and Scott Kolins have been tapped to do future one-shots.

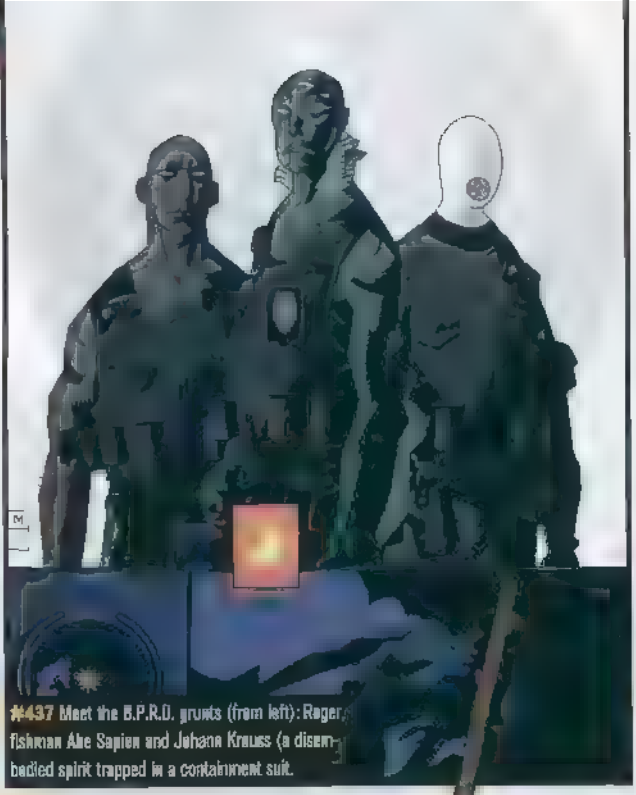
[illegible] (To be determined) This two-issue mini-series picks up immediately following the events of *Hellboy: The Third Wish*, where our intrepid hero roams Africa and gets into trouble with a bitter undersea entity. Mignola held the story details in check, and noted that this series probably wouldn't ship while the anthology and one-shots are coming out, so expect it later in the year. ■ AS

#229) CLAWED JUSTICE

Hellboy's been known to get help from the pulp hero Lobster Johnson on occasion. Lobster likes two things: To burn a claw mark into evildoers' foreheads after they've been thwarted, and, we imagine, drenching himself in butter and lemon after a tough adventure.

#294) HONEST ABE

Abe Sapien—one of the B.P.R.D. agents who works alongside Hellboy—is an amphibious fish-man discovered in a secret chamber under a Washington, D.C. hospital. He was given the name Abe because of a scrap of paper discovered near his containment unit, which had the date April 14, 1865—the date Abe Lincoln died - scrawled on it.



#437 Meet the B.P.R.D. grunts (from left): Roger, fishman Abe Sapien and Johann Krauss (a disembodied spirit trapped in a containment suit.

#333) ROGER, OVER AND OUT

Roger the Homunculus is a 500-year old artificial man created by alchemy and one of Hellboy's partners. He's super-tough and great at smashing stuff, but Hellboy considers him a real friend and confidante. So much so that when the B.P.R.D. took extreme measures against Roger—it placed an explosive device in his chest in case he got out of hand—Hellboy got so pissed, he quit the organization.

#334) HOT STUFF

From the Hourglass Studios Hellboy Nodder (winner of the 2001 Wizard Fan Award for Best Merchandise) to Dark Horse's Hellboy PVC set to Graphitti Designs' Hellboy Action Figures—if you like cool stuff, Hellboy's the property you'll wanna show props to. There's loads of T-shirts, lithos, statues and busts to pick up, cool swag for your home like coaster sets, mugs, lunchboxes and refrigerator magnets and even little collectibles for the faint of wallet like patches and stickers. Check out the Dark Horse Comics (**www.darkhorse.com**) and Hellboy websites (**www.hellboy.com**) to order merchandise.

#350) LABOR OF LOVE

It hasn't been an overnight success story for Hellboy's feature film debut. Del Toro began hatching plans to adapt Hellboy as far back as 1997, when he first started work on the screenplay keeping close contact with Mignola over any changes he might make.

"'Hellboy' is an extremely personal project for me. I've been with it for five years, and you don't stick with it for five years unless you love it deeply," explains del Toro. "I was hoping it would happen the way it is happening, which is with Mike Mignola involved from the get go all the way through post-production."

#388) HOLLYWOOD HOTSHOT

Mignola's combination of design sensibilities and artistic excellence has garnered him attention from the biggest names in Hollywood. He's already done extensive work in Hollywood before on films like "Bram Stoker's Dracula" and Disney's "Atlantis," but he does take his Tinseltown experiences with a grain of salt. "I'll tell you this: Working in Hollywood makes me appreciate coming home, sitting in my studio and working in a very non-collaborative way. The film is just this great other strange beast that took on its own life."

#420) PERLMAN OF WISDOM

The choice to play Hellboy in the feature film? None other than the physically imposing, gravelly-voiced Ron Perlman ("Alien: Resurrection," "Blade II"). "Ron Perlman is Hellboy," explains del Toro. "His persona, his way of speaking, his voice, his presence. *Everything* about him is Hellboy."

#466) TRADE SECRETS

Unlike other series that have been around as long, it's relatively easy to obtain every Hellboy story, thanks to the trade paperbacks that collect all the work. The first five trades—*Seed of Destruction*, *Wake the Devil*, *The Chained Coffin and Other Stories*, *The Right Hand of Doom* and *The Conqueror Worm*—are all available now. Plus, *B.P.R.D.: Hollow Earth and Other Stories*, which just hit stores on Jan. 15. This tome collects the entire "Hollow Earth" storyarc,

hand is all about, check out the *Right Hand of Doom* collection of short stories that provide insight into Hellboy's demonic origins.

#471) AS THE WORM TURNS

A secret Nazi space mission shot the corpse of one Prof. Oeming into the void, hoping his body would be used to house the Conqueror Worm, a creature bent on destroying the Earth. Hellboy gets help from Roger and Lobster Johnson in the *Conqueror Worm* TPB, but quits the B.P.R.D. at the end of the tale in protest over its distrust of Roger and to find himself. Screw that introspective stuff—it's Miller Time, HB.

#529) A RIVER IN EGPYT

That's right—Hellboy's as screwed up as the rest of us, stuck in a morass of denial

as well as solo stories of Abe Sapien in action and a Lobster Johnson back-up tale, "Killer Inside My Skull." And while we're on the subject of trades

#467) GONE TO SEED

In *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*, Rasputin leads a secret Nazi cabal in summoning a super-mystical weapon that'll grant victory to Hitler in World War II. It winds up to be Hellboy, who winds up on the side of the angels when he joins the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense

#468) WAKE UP CALL

The Nazis rear their evil heads once again in *Wake the Devil*, this time undertaking dirty dealings with Giurescu the Vampire, the son of the Witch Queen Hecate. Rasputin returns as well, with designs of vengeance against Hellboy for his betrayal against his destiny as Bringer of the Apocalypse

#622 H.B.'s saved Abe Sapien's life several times. That's why the two are best friends.

#469) THE NAIL IN THE COFFIN

The Chained Coffin and Other Stories collects a host of short Hellboy tales, which is arguably the coolest format for enjoying Hellboy at his paranormal finest. Check out the awesome "Almost Colossus" story featuring Roger the Homunculus' origin and first appearance of his "brother" as well as an excellent werewolf tale, "The Wolves of St. August," which sees HB thwarting a centuries-old werewolf ring

#470) DOOM PATROL

If you wanna know what Hellboy's giant right hand is all about, check out the *Right Hand of Doom* collection of short stories that provide insight into Hellboy's demonic origins.

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A secret Nazi space mission shot the corpse of one Prof. Oeming into the void, hoping his body would be used to house the Conqueror Worm, a creature bent on destroying the Earth. Hellboy gets help from Roger and Lobster Johnson in the *Conqueror Worm* TPB, but quits the B.P.R.D. at the end of the tale in protest over its distrust of Roger and to find himself. Screw that introspective stuff—it's Miller Time, HB.

#529) A RIVER IN EGPYT

That's right—Hellboy's as screwed up as the rest of us, stuck in a morass of denial for which he may need psychological help. As he tells his colleague Kate Corrigan, "You know how I live? I never deal with what I am. I don't think about it. I just do my job, which usually involves me beating the crap out of things a lot like me."

#666) LOVES HIS LAGER

There's a scene in the "Hellboy" movie that sees Hellboy steal a case of brewskies from some bystander who happens to see him running around during a case. And how could you NOT like a guy who likes beer? It's the American way!

Managing Editor Andy Serwin was once called the harbinger of the apocalypse. And then he dumped her ass

THE WIZARD Q&A

Jeph LOEB

With a full-time job writing TV's 'Smallville,' and a part-time gig on 'Batman,' Jeph Loeb has achieved fanboy nirvana: a 24-hour world that revolves around comics

By Richard Ho

On any given Tuesday night, Jeph Loeb can be found parked in front of his television set, doing something you wouldn't expect.

Crying.

You see, Tuesday night is "Smallville" night, and the prolific scribe loves getting caught up in the very show that he helps script.

"I'm a big weepy, weepy fan," Loeb admits freely. "I'll sit there with 20 hankies, watching Clark and Lana up in the loft as they desperately try not to say what they feel, and I'll sob, 'Clark, you love her, tell her that you love her!' Then I have to say, 'Wait a minute, I work on this show. I know what's going to happen!'"

The confession coming from the other end of the phone doesn't sound like the words of a man who crafts the speech of superheroes for a living. But then again, when you've got a slew of dream projects like "Smallville" and DC's monthly *Batman* and *Superman* titles on your plate, it's easy to get lost in your work.

Of course, dream projects are nothing new for Loeb. Thanks to groundbreaking successes like *Batman: The Long Halloween*, *Superman For All Seasons*, and *Daredevil: Yellow*, the writer has earned the trust of both DC and Marvel when it comes to their most beloved icons. And he's not done reshaping the comics landscape. After all, this is the man who helped put Lex Luthor in the White House, the guy who made primary colors cool at Marvel and forced the entire DC Universe go to war.

And comics aren't even his day job.

Somewhere in between dropping his kids off at school and heading off to the

"Smallville" offices for another day of storytelling, Loeb takes time out to chat with us from his cluttered desk at the "Empath School for Gifted Jeffs" – the L.A. office he shares with fellow scribe Geoff Johns (*JSA*, *Avengers*). With his current *Batman* storyline with Jim Lee tearing up the charts, and upcoming projects like *Hulk: Gray* and *Batman/Superman* and Michael Turner's *Dragonfly* series set to turn even more heads, the writer certainly ain't short on things to talk about. And once we get him started, the confessions start flowing freely..

First off, your "Hush" storyline on *Batman* with Jim Lee is kicking serious butt. How does "Hush" differ from your previous Batman stories?

It's a yearlong story line that has little arcs as you go along. So, unlike *The Long Halloween* or *Dark Victory*, which were really big, long novels, this is a series of adventures that have an overall villain and an overall subplot that rides through it, but doesn't necessarily affect every single issue.

What about this mystery villain? Is it somebody we've seen before or somebody completely new?

That would be telling! [*Laughs*] There will be clues along the way, and hopefully some twists. My job as a writer is to try to give the readers enough to work with to solve the mystery, but not so much that they are ahead of Batman.

So, you've got Bat-fans drooling in anticipation of events like a showdown with the Joker, a confrontation with Superman and a Catwoman subplot. What's the skinny on these plotlines?

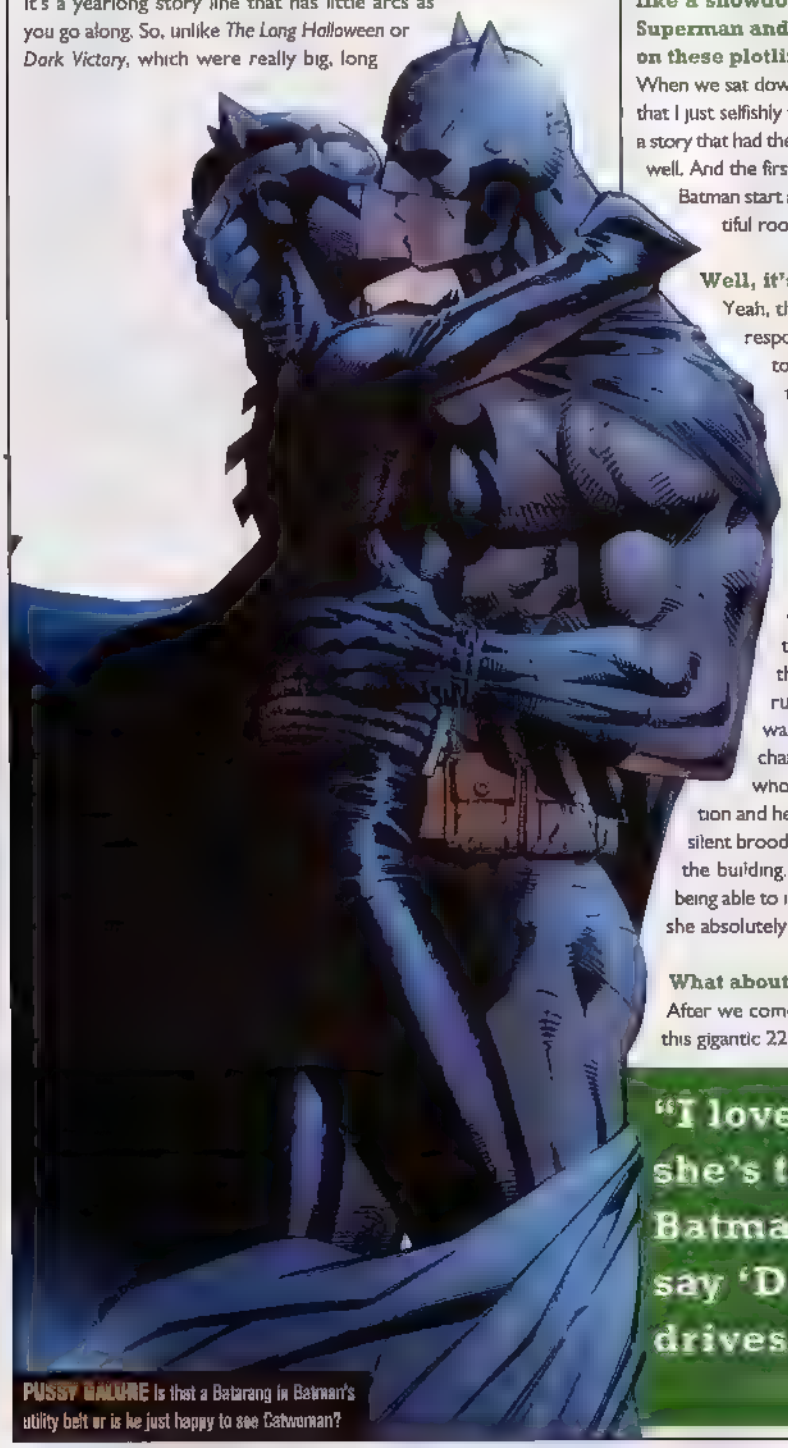
When we sat down to talk about this story, there were certain things that I just selfishly wanted to see Jim draw. But the trick was to create a story that had the elements that I thought Jim would draw really, really well. And the first big peek is that we're going to see Catwoman and Batman start a serious love relationship, which ends with this beautiful rooftop, moonlight kiss. Batman's macking on the Cat!

Well, it's about time!

Yeah, that's sort of how we felt about it. And that kind of response you just gave me was the way that we wanted to approach it, for longtime readers, for the gang on the message boards and for the new fans. At the very beginning, when I first pitched the story to DC, I said that in my mind, Batman is a very romantic character. And I don't mean that in a hearts-and-flowers kind of way—I mean it in more of a traditional kind of way. He's called the "Dark Knight," and there's nothing more romantic than a knight. I believe the stories I've done in the past work best when there's a love story somewhere in them. When I look at *Superman For All Seasons*, there's the love story with Lana Lang. When I look at my run on *Superman*, it's Lois Lane. With Batman, there was only one choice, and that was Selina. I love the character in that she's the only person in Batman's life who can say, "Down boy." When she asks him a question and he doesn't answer her, because he's being the strong, silent brooding type, she responds, "See you later," and dives off the building. And it drives him crazy, because he's so used to being able to intimidate everyone, including his own Bat-family. But she absolutely refuses to take him seriously, and that's great fun.

What about the brawls?

After we come down from that first roller coaster ride, we have this gigantic 22-page throwdown between Batman and Superman.



"I love Catwoman in that she's the only person in Batman's life who can say 'Down boy.' And it drives him crazy."

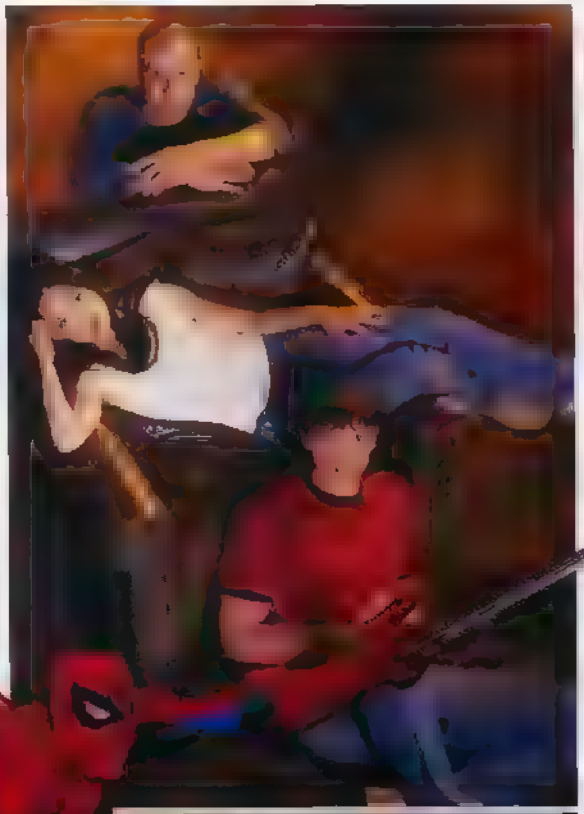
PUSSY GALORE Is that a Batarang in Batman's utility belt or is he just happy to see Catwoman?

It answers the question, "What would happen if these two guys really went at it in continuity?" *Dark Knight Returns* is different—it's in the future, and Batman has help. This was really just to see what Batman would do if he had to stop Superman. We had fun, and Jim just drew the heck out of it.

Where does the Joker fit in?

"Hush" is sort of like a snowball coming down the mountain. One thing leads to another leads to another leads to another, and something happens at the end of the sixth issue [issue #613] that pushes Batman to a place where I would have thought he'd gotten to before, but hasn't yet. When you pile up the bodies that the Joker is responsible for, from Barbara Gordon to Jason Todd, Batman decides that it's enough. The old idea of arresting the Joker and holding him at Arkham Asylum for an hour and 22 minutes before he's out again doesn't work, and he needs to find another solution. We did our best to answer the question, "OK, why doesn't he just kill him?" And there is an answer. I'm not saying it's *the* answer, but it is an answer.

It's very disturbing, and violent in a very intimate kind of way. Nobody's head gets ripped off, but it's a very personal kind of violence. It's a very detailed look into the Batman/Joker relationship, and it builds to a very disturbing climax. When I sent it to Jim, asking him what he thought, he called me back and said, "This is the issue that people will remember from the entire run, and I can't wait to draw it."



"S" WORDS "Smallville" (above) and *Spider-Man: Blue* are two projects that have padded Loeb's impressive résumé.

And that's only halfway through the story-arc! I can't even imagine what comes next.

Uh…a lot actually. We still have to finish the story, but there are things that are coming back into Batman's life. Dick Grayson and Nightwing, for one, because they have to deal with what happens in the seventh issue [#614]. And just getting Jim to draw Nightwing will be another one of those things where everyone is very delighted.

On the subject of Jim, how do you compare working with him to working with someone like Tim Sale or Ed McGuinness or other artists you've worked with?

Everybody is different. I try to write to a particular artist's strengths. If I had to compartmentalize them, Ed is this booster rocket who's blown off the first stage, and I have no idea how many stages are left before he decides to hang up his six-shooter. Tim is the master who is at the top of his game right now and can draw anything he wants to, and chooses to work with me and allow me to work with his gift. And Jim is the hall-of-famer who has come back to the game to basically say, "I'm as good as I was 10 years ago." And in fact, I think he's better.

Let's talk "Smallville." How much Superman lore from the comics do you try to get into the show?

It's funny, because when I first came to the show, I think everyone expected me to be the Comic Book Guy [from "The Simpsons"] I get paid to come in every Wednesday morning and, in a high-pitched nasally voice say, "Worst episode ever!" And then I go home. That's it. That's all I do all week long! [*Laughs*] But that's not really what it's about. Again, I didn't come from comics to "Smallville"—I spent most of my career working in movies and television. When Al Gough and Miles Millar, the creators and executive producers of the show, asked me to come in, it was a combination of the stuff that I had written in movies and television and my work in comics. Specifically my work on *Superman For All Seasons*, which they generously acknowledge is one of the influences on the show.

But because we work in such a close-knit group to build the best stories, there isn't an individual aspect that I bring to the Writer's Room. They're an incredibly talented group of writers. I think we could be working on any show and put out some of the best scripts on television.

Now, do I get paid to sit in a room and talk about Superman all day long? Yeah. That's pretty cool.

Can you give us any specific examples of the comics finding their way onscreen?

In the episode that aired in the middle of January, which was my second episode, called "Insurgence," there's a cop in Metropolis, and when we were breaking the story [**EDITOR'S NOTE**. *Breaking the story is when a group of writers are in a room and everybody contributes to the outline of the story*], I said, "It would be fun if this character was Maggie Sawyer." Now, is she going to be the same Maggie Sawyer that's in the comics? That comes down to casting and how it's played and things like that. But that's fun to me. And it's always Al and Miles' call, as to how many of those winks any given year we want to have happen. The show has its own continuity, so it can't veer off into DC Comics-land all of a sudden. But there are things like Cadmus Labs and a place called Bluehaven, and that kind of stuff are shout-outs to the fans.

THE YELLOW KID Loeb and Sale's *Daredevil: Yellow* sees a Fledgling Man Without Fear fretting over the love of his life, Karen Page.

Does working on "Smallville" affect how you work on comics at all?

Yeah, I think so. Being writers, I think everything affects us. And I would hope that being in a room with people like Al and Miles and the rest of the writing gang makes me a better writer. In the same way that when I was working on [the yet-to-air] "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" animated series those people and specifically ["Buffy" creator] Joss Whedon affected my work in a very positive way.

I'm very lucky that through all of my comic book career, I've had a second career, or a first career depending upon my day, and I've never stopped working in the film and television business. There's been an awful lot of stuff that people haven't seen, but that's what it is to be a screenwriter in Hollywood. I can't make a living in comics. I have a wife and two kids and two cats, and the cats spend money like it was growing on the trees. So when I do comics, it ain't for the money. Those days are gone. The upside is that you then get people who work in comics because they love comics and you see it in their work. Brian Michael Bendis does not need to work in comics. He works in comics because he loves them and the work shows on the page. Mark Millar is another person who, every time I read what he does, I smile, because he's helping all of us write up to where he's going. That's exciting.

I'm still a fan. I still go every Wednesday to the store. I still buy comics that Marvel and DC sends comps of, because the comps come at the end of the month, and I can't wait 'til then. I need to know *now*! And I have this ridiculous comic book collection which has taken over the garage, and my wife would very much like to put her car there, but that's not going to happen any time soon. [*Laughs*]

You've got *Hulk: Gray* and *Batman/Superman* on the horizon. What drew you those projects?

What I love about the Hulk is what draws me to any character—the tragedy of their lives. Bruce Banner is one of those unique characters who doesn't want the powers he has. The Hulk is a lesson in moral ambiguity. He's reviled by most of the characters that he comes in contact with, a monster that no one, with the exception of Betty Ross and Rick Jones, wants anything to do with other than kill it.

Daredevil: Yellow was called that because his costume was yellow, but it was also about a Man Without Fear who was afraid of living in a world without Karen Page. *Spider-Man: Blue*, there's blue in his costume, but it was also about feeling blue in the jazz and rhythm & blues way of looking at the world. And in the case of *Hulk: Gray*, the Hulk was gray for an issue before Stan Lee decided to turn him into, to use his words, 'green genes.' But what I'm drawn to is the concept of gray in a black and white world, where there are good guys and evildoers. The Hulk is the personification of gray. Inside is Bruce Banner and on the other end is this rampaging beast. What do you do about that?

And then the pure fanboy of "Hulk Smash!" is just great stuff. Also, I love the supporting cast. Rick to me is a really interesting character. I mean, how dumb do you have to be to drive your hotrod out onto a nuclear testing field with your harmonica, and sit there with your feet up on the dash, going, "Wait till the guys find out that I sat next to a nuclear explosion?"?!? Well, when you're a pile of ash Rick, let us know!

Okay, *Batman/Superman*...how is this story going to be different from all their past meetings?

I've always loved the old *World's Finest* stories, so this isn't a slam on them in any way—but I always felt that those stories were making up plots to somehow get those characters together. The Joker would show up in Metropolis and, oh goodness, he would use laughing Kryptonite spray and we needed Batman to come in and knock the Joker's head off. Or, Luthor or Brainiac would turn up in Gotham City and all hilarity would ensue. [*Laughs*] But the Justice League and Avengers don't really need a reason to get together, they're just together. They fight the evils of the world.

Batman's the world's greatest detective and Superman is the greatest hero who ever lived. When you put them together, it's better that peanut butter and chocolate—and that's pretty good. So, we needed to start with a story that was big enough to warrant the two of them getting together.

Lex Luthor is the President of the United States, and *I* was the one that put him there! I was the one who said, at the very beginning, "This is a really bad thing." And the more popular Lex becomes, the more dangerous he becomes. The fox is in the henhouse, guys!

So something happens in the first issue where, despite everything else that he's done—and he's done some really horrible things—he just goes too far, and Superman and Batman have to decide how to take him down once and for all. But how do you do that without bringing down the entire government and without turning the entire DC Universe against you? Because, no matter what else he is, he is still the President of the United States.

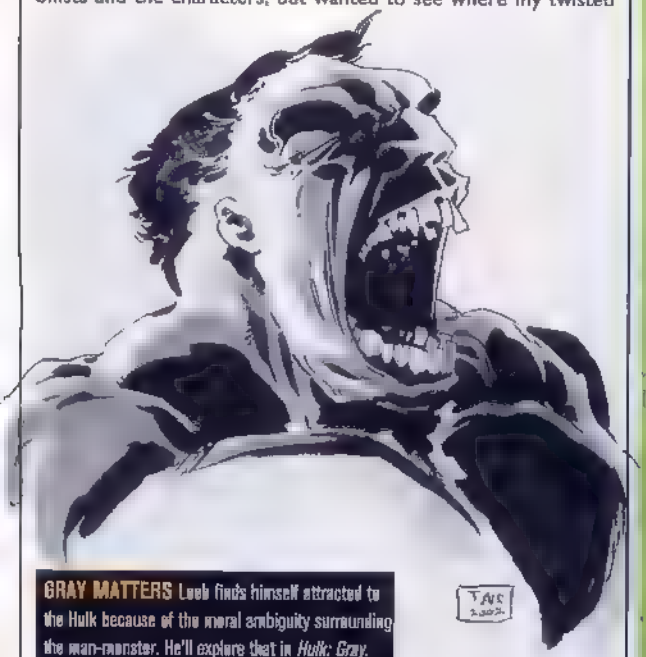
We have the two biggest, bad-ass guys in the DCU. Let's do big, bad-ass stories. One of the things that I have learned from work-

ing with Jim is, if you've got Batman and you've got Jim Lee, then do Batman vs. Superman, do Batman vs. the Joker, do Nightwing, do a Catwoman love story, do the things that people have wanted to see for 60 years and have them illustrated beautifully

So I think the operative word is "big."

What can you tell us about Michael Turner's *Dragonfly: Soulfire*, which you're also writing?

Mike and I have toyed around with the promise of working together, but the right project never came together. Suddenly, he appeared with this magical idea. He had figured out a lot of the world, the antagonists and the characters, but wanted to see where my twisted



GRAY MATTERS Loeb finds himself attracted to the Hulk because of the moral ambiguity surrounding the man-monster. He'll explore that in *Hulk: Gray*.

brain would take it all. I haven't really worked in this genre before and I'm hoping that grounds it in a way that maybe another writer wouldn't. Mike had some designs that were just spectacular and the lead woman is... startling. Then again, she's drawn by Turner so what do you expect?! It was just one of those things, right time, right place. He even had the idea of making it a competing project with my suite mate and pal Geoff John's Mike Turner project [*Ekos*] and so I get to torture Geoff 'cause ours is SO much cooler than theirs! [*Laughs*] But, contrary to the rumors, this is Mike's creation, Mike's company and Mike's future. I would do anything to help this man and fortunately, we've found a way to have fun doing it.

What do you feel is your best work ever? What are you most proud of?

You know, they're all things that I'm very proud of for different reasons. A lot of them have to do with remembering the moment of working with a certain person, and how much fun that was. But I would probably have to say *Superman For All Seasons*. It so came out of nowhere, and none of us expected it to be as successful as it was, and to be as defining as it was. To write a Superman story and see it go as far as being one of the inspirations for "Smallville" is just a smile.

And at the end of the day, that's what it's all about—finding the smiles.

Hired gun Richard Ho cries in front of the TV every Tuesday night after his favorite show— 8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter

DYNAMIC DUO

Certain things in life just go better together: peanut butter and jelly; bacon and eggs; Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale.

The two collaborators, who together have crafted some of the best stories in comics, including *Daredevil: Yellow* and *Superman For All Seasons*, are fast becoming one of the top creative teams in comics' history. But it's not too late to get your hands on their entire body of work! Here's a handy checklist of everything the two creators have jammed on together.

(DC COMICS)
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #0 (Wizard #97 supplement)
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #1
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #2
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #3
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #4
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #5
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #6
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #7
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #8
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #9
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #10
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #11
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #12
- ❑ Batman: Dark Victory #13

(DC COMICS)
- ❑ Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight Halloween Special #1
- ❑ Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight Halloween Special #2
- ❑ Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight Halloween Special #3

(DC COMICS)
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #2
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #3
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #4
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #5
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #6
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #7
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #8
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #9
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #10
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #11
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #12
- ❑ Batman: The Long Halloween #13

MARVEL
- ❑ Cable #23

(DC COMICS)

MINI SERIES
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #1
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #2
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #3
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #4
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #5
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #6
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #7
- ❑ Challengers of the Unknown #8

(MARVEL)
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #1
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #2
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #3
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #4
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #5
- ❑ Daredevil: Yellow #6

(MARVEL)
- ❑ Savage Hulk (one-shot; back-up story)

(MARVEL)
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #1
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #2
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #3
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #4
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #5
- ❑ Spider-Man: Blue #6

(DC COMICS)
- ❑ Superman For All Seasons #1
- ❑ Superman For All Seasons #2
- ❑ Superman For All Seasons #3
- ❑ Superman For All Seasons #4

(MARVEL)
- ❑ Uncanny X-Men Annual #18 (back-up story)

(HARRIS)
- ❑ Vampirella #18

(DC COMICS)
VOLUME 2
- ❑ Who's Who #7 (Loose-leaf: Challengers of the Unknown intro)

(MARVEL COMICS)
- ❑ Wolverine/Gambit: Victims #1
- ❑ Wolverine/Gambit: Victims #2
- ❑ Wolverine/Gambit: Victims #3

ROG

GALLERY

WIZARD selects the best (and worst) of comics' greatest rogues galleries

By Jake Rossen and the *Wizard* Staff

Most museums are full of Picassos, Monets and other beautiful works of art. But the only gallery to display the ugliest and wickedest man has to offer lies across the tracks, in the seedier part of town—the rogues gallery.

Sure, playing the hero's a blast, but ask anyone and they'll tell you it's the villains that steal the show time after time. From the Joker's plot to drive Commissioner Gordon insane in *Batman: The Killing Joke* to the Green Goblin's unmasking of Peter Parker as Spider-Man to Magneto's genocidal dream of a Homo Superior–ruled world, it's always been the villains—not the heroes—that keep stories moving and keep fans coming back to comic shops month after month.

"The old saying is true: A hero is only as good as his villain," says *Flash* writer and villain revamp-master Geoff Johns. "A villain has to be as compelling and interesting and formidable as the hero, to give him a real challenge. You have to give them a personal connection and tie, and you have to keep using them."

And it's not easy being a villain, either. Sure, any thug can whack a family, abduct a kid or plan a heist, but it takes real vision to become a supervillain that fits into Batman, Spider-Man or the JLA's rogues gallery—just check out how far some villains went to become *the* rogue to the top heroes in comics. Wizard's picked out the 10 best rogues galleries you'll find in comics...plus a few morts thrown in for good measure.

Illustration by Dreshall Jones

SUPERMAN ROGUES

THE GOOD: There's no presidential pardon here.

Big Blue makes this list thanks to one single rogue: **Lex Luthor,** otherwise known as the DCU's Commander in Chief.

Having spent the last 15 years or so free of purple shirts with ruffled collars and dumbed-down robotic battlesuits, Luthor dominates the otherwise-insipid Superman rogues gallery for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, he's just a regular guy! Even with a gifted criminal mind and vast resources at his disposal, Luthor utilizes his clever manipulations to match the far-superior physical abilities of the Man of Steel. Since his election to the presidency in 2000, Luthor's caused more headaches for Superman than Doomsday on a Jolt Cola bender. As the leader of the free world, Luthor clutches the power to keep Superman at bay, especially since the boy scout's never dug up any admissible evidence on Luthor's dealings with the Injustice Gang, Imperiex and other assorted no-goodniks.

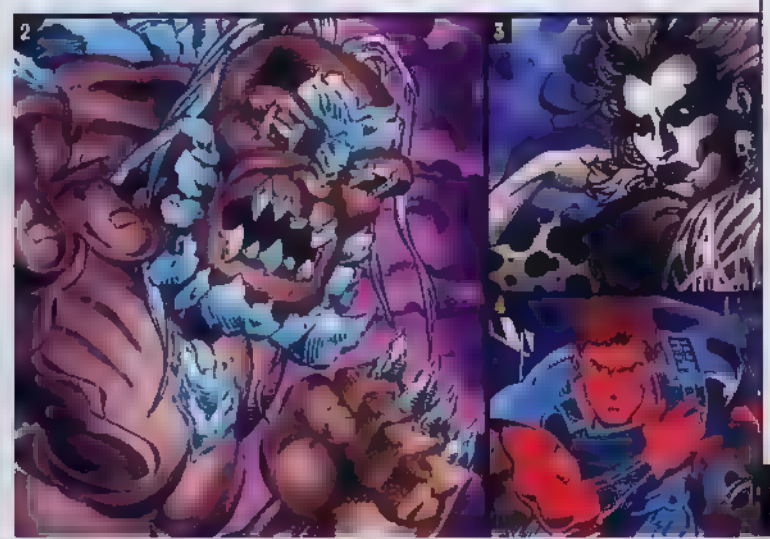
While Luthor excels as Superman's top nemesis, the rest of Kal-El's rogues aren't all dregs. If it hadn't been for Supes' diametric double **Bizarro**, other evil and crazed mirror images of superheroes such as Venom and the Abomination never would have seen the ugly light of day. Supes can also always count on a hurtin' from killer computer **Brainiac,** the dark lord of Apokolips **Darkseid** and **Manchester Black,** the *Authority*-influenced leader of the Elite.

THE BAD: An idea that worked better in theory than in practice, **Doomsday** was responsible for a bunch of gutless weasels actually crying when it was announced in '93 that he had "killed" Superman.

Apparently, those people never read a comic in their life. Even with a sound concept, Doomsie's never been more than a slack-jawed lummox.

Silver Banshee looks hot in a Halloween kind of way, but her powers—an irritating wail—suck. Feeding on the lifeforce of humans, **Parasite** is just an idiot janitor who fell into some toxic waste. He even posed as Lois Lane for a time! (Eewww...) You can always count on **Titano** the overgrown ape for some comic relief, as there are only so many great giant-monkey stories.

THE UGLY: **Terra-Man** doesn't get points merely for his hokey name. Oh no. The fact that he was born in the Old West and subsequently raised by aliens, only to return to Earth and threaten our delicate ecosystem, gets him the high honors. That, and his idiot costume.



SUPER BAD (1) Lex Luthor; (2) Doomsday; (3) Silver Banshee and (4) Terra Man.

DRAGON SLAYERS

We'll say this for the Savage Dragon: He's got the most consistently entertaining and ridiculous rogues gallery around. Poop-shooters? "Zap head"-fog monkeys? While some of his fiends below can be considered all kinds of wrecking, their abilities and villainies can at least be counted on to induce milk-shooting from the nose.

BRAINIAPE

After Hellboy blew up Hitler, his brain survived—only to be placed in a fishbowl atop the body of an ape. Imagine the Morphine bill on that little operation.

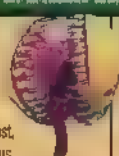
DUNG

We guess this guy is a problem. The dude can teleport feces from other dimensions and shoot it out his arm cannons. He even completely filled Dragon's apartment with poop! Who knows what kind of bacteria lurks in Uranus?

CESSPOOL

Ever wonder what would happen if you popped a zit that was, like, three hundred pounds? 'Cause that's Cesspool's big power. Or he can just ooze acid out of his pustules. So far Erik Larsen's refrained from introducing Stridex Gal.

OPENFACE



If you're thinking sandwich, you soon won't be. A disenchanted scientist, Openface can split his head open into two sets of chomping, nasty teeth.

POWERHOUSE

If you've got the body of a pro wrestler and the tiny head of a chicken, what should you do? Slap on a cape and a Robin-style mask and resort to a life of crime? Yeah, there you go. This guy's kicked Dragon's ass on numerous occasions.

9 JLA ROGUES

THE GOOD: A three-eyed, purple, intergalactic critter may sound cute, but the monstrous **Despero** sure as hell ain't Disney fare.

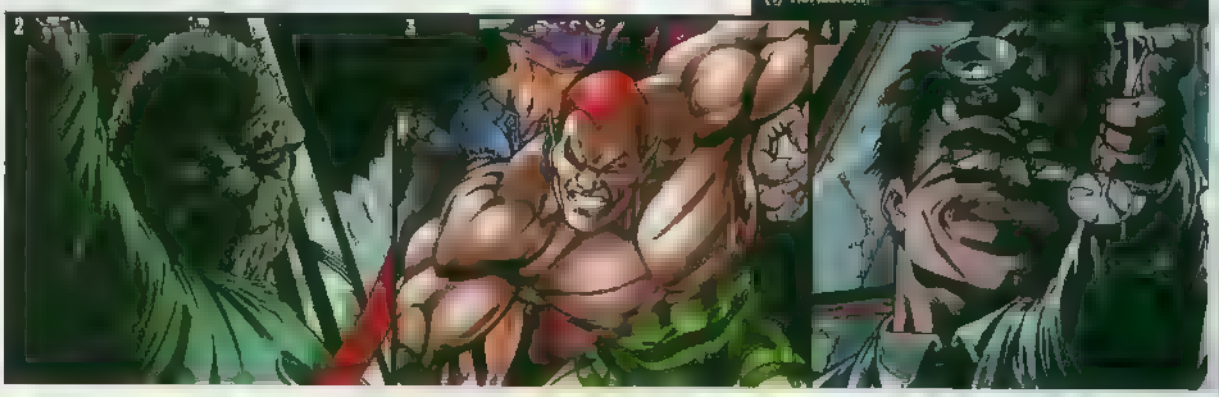
First appearing back in 1960's *Justice League of America* #1, Despero's come a long way from his days of orange pullovers and chess-playing trickery. Revitalized in the mid-'80s with a Mohawk-style fin atop his head, a bulkier physique and a newfound savagery, Despero's raw, unbridled rage allowed him to tear through several JLA lineups over the past two decades. Known for donning shredded U.N. and American flags, Despero's gone toe-to-toe with big guns like Superman and Martian Manhunter, easily besting their own alien abilities. Fueled by an unquenchable desire for vengeance, the native Kalanite brutally murdered the parents of second-tier Leaguer Gypsy and didn't even flinch at the full-on force of Green Lantern Guy Gardner upon his reintroduction in *Justice League International* #38. In the recent *JLA/JSA: Virtue and Vice* crossover, Despero man(alien?)handled not one, but TWO heavyweight-packed DCU superteams!

Of course, what would the Justice League be without their very own representatives of IN-Justice? The Lex Luthor-led **Injustice Gang** has stymied the League on more than one occasion thanks to the skill-adapting **Prometheus** and the mind-altering abilities of the **Queen Bee**. And who can forget those pesky **White Martians**? Their Thunderbolts-like posing as the heroic Hyperclan reunited the JLA!

THE BAD: An android created by the scheming, batty-as-all Hell **Professor Ivo**, **Amazo**'s powers include assimilating the talents of any superhuman he encounters, making him the Super-Skrull of the DCU. All fine and dandy, but what's with the swimming cap? Afraid you'll get your noodle wet pursuing Aquaman, you prissy bastard?

Ivo himself is one to keep an eye on, with his immortality serum making him resemble nothing so much as a prune. **Starro the Conqueror** is a giant starfish cookie with powers of telepathy...who commands little starfish. The stuff of nightmares! And the **Royal Flush Gang**'s card gimmick deserves a royal flush, all right. Right down the potty.

THE UGLY: T.O. Morrow: Did his parents find this clever? Did they get some bad advice? Whatever the case, Grant Morrison couldn't even make him interesting. He's just another nutty professor that needs to be thrown off a bridge



ANTI-JUSTICE: (1) Despero; (2) Professor Ivo; (3) Amazo and (4) T.O. Morrow.

JIMBO DA MIGHTY LOBSTER

"When Pothead Fans Win Creative Contests," next on FOX. Jimbo is a barge worker/shellfish on steroids who got pissed when someone told him the Dragon was a better fighter

ABNER CADAVER

He gets points for a groovy name, anyway. Cadaver has been around for thousands of years and bills himself as an "undead sorcerer supreme." He's also responsible for The Horde, a rogue made outta leeches.

OCTOPUS

If it's parody, it's semi-legal! Octopus stands, quite obviously, as a knock-off of Marvel's Doc Ock (complete with glasses and the old bowl haircut) the Big Twist being that he's got actual tentacles growing out of his stomach.

CHAOS & CONTROL

Quite the contrast, eh? Chaos is a big, dumb monster-thing. Control is his young human master. He can control Chaos by sticking his horns into his eye sockets and riding him like a rented mule. The stuff of Tequila brunches.

BABY BOOM

Holy sh— This diminutive Dragon villain can splatter his explosive diarrhea on command. The Olsen Twins shoulda hopped on this gimmick years ago

8 THE HULK ROGUES

THE GOOD: Gamma rays is good, eh comrade?

While the Hulk has his fair share of powerhouse adversaries, the **Abomination** takes the largest piece of moldy, gamma-irradiated cake. A soviet spy who purposefully exposed himself to gamma rays after infiltrating a New Mexico military base, Emil Blonsky was transformed into the horribly mutated yet overwhelmingly powerful Abomination. Not only is his raw power level greater than that of the Hulk, Blonsky retained his intellect, making for the most frightfully imposing rogue to hang in the Hulk's gallery. Blonsky made things personal between he and Bruce Banner when he fatally poisoned Mrs. Hulk herself, Betty Banner. He even took the abuse one step further by revealing to the Hulk his wife's cryogenically preserved corpse! Blonsky has resurfaced in recent issues of *Incredible Hulk*, and now that's he learned of Banner's involvement with his estranged wife Nadia, things are going to get a lot uglier than the Abomination's eggcrate-shaped noggin.

When the green goliaths aren't pounding each other into gamma paste, Hulk can always count on a wide array of equally troublesome rogues to ruin lots of purple pants. The cosmic ray-powered **U-Foes** are some of the coolest, most-underused bad guys, while the world-conquering **Maestro** (a future version of the Hulk) proved that the Hulk really is his own worst enemy. And who can forget the titanic tussles of Jade Jaws has enjoyed with fuzzballs like the savage **Wendigo** and James Howlett himself, the **Wolverine**?

THE BAD: Gremlin? This guy looks like a reject from a Ful Moon casting call. A Russian scientist with a cranium the size of a competition pumpkin, Grems inherited the ugly gene from his dad, who was blasted by radiation. Or maybe his mom just smoked.

Another normalcy-challenged freakshow whose bulbous head can hold tons of useless information, the **Leader** only ever succeeded in having a sinister moustache. **The Hulkbusters** were a bunch of regular Joes enlisted by that old warhorse Thunderbolt Ross to destroy the Green Goliath. A noble cause, as even Banner himself joined up at one point.

THE UGLY: Tyrannus: You know, it's one thing to say you're going to go out and find the Fountain of Youth, and it's another thing to actually do it.

Even so, Tyrannus is still one lame-ass villain. Banished to the seas by Merlin, he's hell-bent on conquering the "surface world." Take a number.

MEAN JOE GREEN (1) The Abomination; (2) Maestro; (3) U-Foes and (4) Tyrannus.

WHAT THE HEIL?

First things first: Nazis are really evil bastards, and we hate 'em. That's why they make the best supervillains! The most theatrical, over-the-top rogues generally come from backgrounds where at least one family member is named Fritz. Here are some of the best Third Reich seatbelt-riders comics have to offer:

RED SKULL

Was there ever an uglier SOB in Captain America's history? Johann Shmidt was a Swastika-sucking chemist circa WWII who's been nipping at Cap's heels ever since. Crazy, but not dumb.

HATE-MONGER

A parade of bozos that started with Adolf Hitler donning the goony cloak (and purple KKK hat) and spewing "hate rays" from his "hate gun," and later a "hate android" capable of shape-shifting. Whatever.

BARON BLOOD

So who died and made this joker a baron? John Falsworth was a happy-go-lucky prettyboy who stumbled into Transylvania and got his neck sucked by Dracula, turning him into a Nazi vampire. And then Captain America beheaded him.

BARON ZEMO

Heinrich Zemo berk, or just misunderstood? The Nazi scientist got in Cap's face and screamed in agony after a chemical spill bonded his mask to his puss.

BARON STRUCKER

Another Baron? Lordy. This tool (with another messed-up face) was a Nick Fury foe who wielded a "claw" that gave him immense strength and an immense attitude. Temporary alliances with the Skull and HYDRA proved futile.

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ROGUES

THE GOOD: The Blight weren't interested in just destroying crops.

Other villains have had longer tenures of terror against the Legion, but no menace impacted the futuristic teens more than the Blight, an alien race of lifeforce-sucking vampires. In one month, the Blight conquered all of Earth and defeated most of the Legion, utilizing mind-control abilities to use captured Legionnaires as weapons against humanity—with the ultimate goal of wiping out all life in the galaxy!

The bright and shiny 31st century had suddenly been transformed into a ruined landscape of fear, hopelessness and despair—and though the Legion would ultimately prove victorious, they now realized that the threats of their era could bring about complete extinction in the blink of an eye

The threats have only escalated, with **Ra's Al Ghul**, the twisted madman who bedeviled Batman and the JLA in the 21st century, nearly wiping out Earth with a forced bout of evolution, followed by another near invasion, this time at the hands of the sentient machine species called **Robotica**. Those menaces, combined with classic Legion foes like the **Fatal Five, Computo** and the **Legion of Super-Villains**, illustrate that the brighter the future, the darker the shadows that plague it.

THE BAD: Dr. Regulus proves, for the umpteenth time, that psychos should never be granted access to labs and beakers and chemicals and all that stuff. In fact, science should be banned altogether. Who needs it? Exploiting the properties of "radioactive gold," he's the arch-nemesis of Sun-Boy, but we suspect SB laughs at him behind his back, so uncool is he.

Sun Eater doesn't fare much better: As a life form, it can actually ingest an entire planet if the Controllers see fit to destroy it. There's something about evil fog that just doesn't give us all that many willies.

THE UGLY: Starfinger: DCU villain, or Rental of the Week behind the saloon doors at Video Hut? You decide. We know which one is less fun, as the comic 'Finger is merely a robot-thing that can shoot semi-harmful crap out of his fingers

LEGION OF SUPER-VILLAINS (1) The Blight; (2) Ra's Al Ghul; (3) Dr. Regulus and (4) Starfinger.

ULTRA-HUMANITE
Now here's a creepy situation: This dude keeps putting his brain in other people's bodies, including the Americommando, a big white monkey (BrainApe's drunken uncle?), and a stacked chick. Now the latter isn't a bad idea.

DYNA-MAN
Looks like a young studmuffin, right? Look twice, Chester! Golden Age savior Dyna-Man is actually Hitler's brain transferred to the body of a strapping young man. Der Führer with muscles? Scary

ARNIM ZOLA
Another demented biochemist? Is there any other kind? It must be the lack of women. Zola transferred his consciousness into that of an android with a face for a torso, leaving himself looking like one goofy bastard.

BARON BLITZKRIEG
Yet another Baron who got acid tossed in his kisser, Blitz gained sympathy from Hitler and drugs to enhance himself. Only claim to fame: Killing the Red Bee

RED SKULL IN "CAPTAIN AMERICA" (1990)
Boo-haw-haw-haw! Hollywood geniuses do it again. This Skull is a friggin' Italian guy. But what else could we expect from the director of "Cyborg" and the disappointing offspring of novelist J.D. Salinger?

FANTASTIC FOUR ROGUES

THE GOOD: Before Marvel gave us any Ultimate books, they gave us the ultimate supervillain: **Dr. Doom.**

Driven by an unbridled hatred for FF leader Reed Richards, Victor Von Doom encompasses all of the essential elements that comprise a landmark villain: He's a would-be world conqueror who rules his own country (Latveria), he's severely scarred both physically and emotionally, and he decks himself out in a costume that immediately instills respect...and fear. But Doom's not just another armor-clad megalomaniac; his scientific mind is second only to that of Richards. Plus, Doom's an accomplished mage who could give Dr. Strange a run for his title as Sorcerer Supreme!

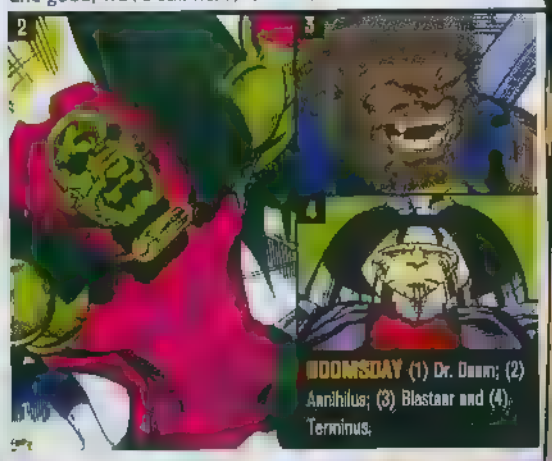
Even now, Doom has all of the capabilities to become one of the Marvel Universe's greatest heroes. However, his own vanity will always stand in his way. Even as the leader of a crime-free nation and undyingly loved by Latveria's citizens, Doom will never be able to fathom, comprehend or accept being second to Mr. Fantastic, especially since Doom blames him for everything that he's lost in life.

If the constant threat of Doom weren't enough, the FF must be ever vigilant of the threat of the planet-devouring **Galactus**, as Earth will always be a menu special that makes him lick his chops. Toss in the war-mongering, shape-shifting **Skrulls** and **Annihilus**, the keeper of the Negative Zone (and bar none, the scariest-looking character in comics), it's a wonder the FF doesn't need a quadruple dose of cosmic rays!

THE BAD: The Frightful Four? Yeah, look at us quake in our Chuck T's. This amalgam of suck poses such a non-threat, they have trouble keeping a steady roster of villains at their disposal. **Wizard**, **Medusa**, and **Trapster** have all come and gone, though it's not as if anything better awaits.

A piece of cosmic crud that hangs in the Negative Zone, **Blastaar** doesn't need to eat, sleep or poop, although form usually follows function. **Dragon Man** blows smoke as a dragon android with childlike sensibilities... and cute purple undershorts. The creator of Dragon Man, **Diablo** draws his powers from potions...and that dated Fu-Manchu 'stache.

THE UGLY: You know you've got it bad when even as a world destroyer, you get no respect. **Terminus** stands tall as an alien offspring that can channel a planet's energy via his lance, causing it to self-destruct. While that's all well and good, we're still here, aren't we?



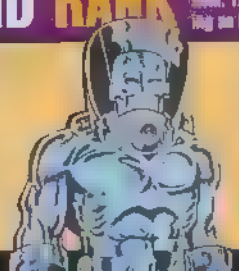
DOOMSDAY (1) Dr. Doom; (2) Annihilus; (3) Blastaar and (4) Terminus.

UNRANKED AND RANK

And as it may seem, some superheroes suck. The rest of their rogues gallerie[illegible] big as Michael Jackson's kids' room. We could [illegible]

DAREDEVIL

Okay, okay. We'll give DD that big slab of mancake the Kingpin. He's fairly formidable. Ditto for Bullseye: a sufficiently demented opponent. But who's left? Stilt-Man (right.)? Gladiator? The Owl? We've seen better villainy in preschool. Look for Matt Murdock to start staging his own murders to solve and start looking good again.



GREEN LANTERN

Sinestro has some old-school charm. Major Force killed Kyle Rayner's girlfriend and kept her in the fridge. And that's about where things stop getting interesting for GL. Hector Hammond (another big head) just freaks us out, while Killer Shark and Fatality wouldn't excite an orphan kid if they were at the bottom of his Happy Meal.

WONDER WOMAN

It's a good thing WW has ties with the JLA, because otherwise she'd probably start lassoing goats out of boredom. Cheetah and Giganta stand out somewhat, but only by "Saige Friends" association. Otherwise we're talking all cream-of-the-crap losers like Dr. Poison. So very, very depressing.

THE AVENGERS ROGUES

THE GOOD: Give the **Masters of Evil** credit. They to live up to their name.

No matter what incarnation or what kind of victory—from inserting Wonder Man on the team as a mole, to framing Hanky Pym as a traitor, to infiltrating and destroying Avengers Mansion—the Masters have punched the tickets of Earth's Mightiest Heroes with more frequency and more devastation than any other group of supervillains.

Never had the Masters of Evil come so close to ultimate victory than the time they stormed Avengers Mansion in *Avengers* #273. Led by the second **Baron Zemo**, the Masters of Evil—comprised of over 15 members this time, including **Mr. Hyde**, the **Wrecking Crew** and **Goliath**—successfully divided the Avengers' forces, overrunning and taking control of the mansion.

During that escapade, the Masters of Evil beat Hercules into a coma, mercilessly tortured Jarvis the butler, completely demolished the Avengers' HQ and destroyed most of Captain America's personal mementos, including his original shield from World War II and the only remaining photograph of his mother.

It was only through heroics beyond the call of duty by Cap, Thor and the Wasp that allowed them to prevail. However, the victory was not without cost, as the team found itself in turmoil in the subsequent months, even disbanding at one point!

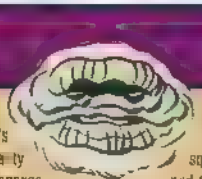
Few other menaces have come as close to defeating the Avengers, but the adamantium android **Ultron** has come frighteningly close on many an occasion. The Asgardian God of Mischief **Loki** was responsible for the team's formation in the first place and has crossed swords with the team many times since. And while not the most recognizable name, **Graviton** has used his awesome gravitational powers to nearly crush the Avengers, who have only narrowly triumphed thanks to some last-minute act of trickery or deception on their part.

THE BAD: Yellow Claw? We're exiting "Bad" territory and galloping nicely towards "Downright Offensive." A very, very old Chinese master of the black arts, the Claw possesses numerous potions and toxins to aid in his delusions of grandeur. Somehow, crinkly old men don't put the fear of God in us.

Grim Reaper just happens to have a big, scary scythe and once had a Jones for avenging the death of his brother, Wonder Man. Now he's just fruitcake-nutty. **Kang**, meanwhile, enjoys traveling through time and meeting his equally unsuccessful doppelgangers so they can swap stories of failure. **The Supreme Intelligence** floats in a tank, an oversized booger/collection of the greatest Kree minds, designed to rule them all. What does two dozen pounds of stupid get you? Lots of stupid, so we're not sure we see the point in that little exercise.

THE UGLY: Moses Magnum: That's where it begins and ends, friends. This tall drink of suck was once an arms dealer. Apocalypse actually rescued him from a hole in the earth and gave him super-powers. But MM was so inept at challenging Our Heroes, he actually fell into another hole and hasn't been seen since. You'd think he'd learn to not back up without taking a look behind first.

EVIL EMPIRE (1) Baron Zemo; (2) Supreme Intelligence; (3) Kang and (4) Moses Magnum.



CAPTAIN AMERICA

Take away Nazis and Cap's left with precious little quality opposition. Judging by his appearance, Dr. Faustus obsesses over Freud while being a plump smartass. A.M. guys: Beekeepers or welders running amok? And Doughboy above)? A pastry gone bad. Barrel-snrapers, all

IRON MAN

We give Shellhead props for squaring off against Titanium Man and the Ghost but that's it. Mandarin never did a damned thing with those fancy rings, and Black Lash drove the sentient Iron Man armor to kill him. No wonder Stark drinks like a bloated fish.

JSA

We say again: Nazis suck, but they sure do make for some decent villains. The Ultra-Humanite terrorized the JSA at every turn, but that's about all they got to brag about. Extant, a.k.a. Hawk, Monarch? Please. Vandal Savage? A Ra's Al Ghul clone, and not a very good one. Let's get some planet-eaters!

THOR

We dig Loki, the dude knows his terrorizing from his beans. And Absorbing Man and the occasional Frost Giant are good for some giggles. But Mongoose, Quicksand, Mangog and Stellaris the Celestial Slayer? Chump, turkey, chump and bozo. Not necessarily in that order. Guys running with scissors would be a bigger challenge.

4 THE FLASH ROGUES

THE GOOD: Thanks to scores of near Arctic assassinations, the Flash has learned that there's just no cure for the Cold.

Despite an army of arch-foes that comprise Flash's Rogues Gallery, **Captain Cold** raises the bar for villainy every time he causes the temperature to drop. But in Cold's most chilling and diabolical act, the Scarlet Speedster wasn't even the target of an Absolute Zero attack—it was a second-rate knock-off called Chillblaine, the man who murdered Cold's sister, the Golden Glider.

Cold fought his way through an army of hired goons to take on Chillblaine, who was working as hired muscle for a local mobster. After a brief tussle, Cold gets the better of Chillblaine, freezing the surface molecules of Chillblaine's skin—so he can feel everything that's about to happen to him—before tossing him off the penthouse balcony and impaling him on an ice formation.

Despite that savage act of revenge, Cold is more of a schemer than a killer; in fact, he's even been known to team up with Flash if it can help him out in the long run. Cold aided the Speedster while they were both trapped in a mirror world dimension and again at a hockey game when the molten Tar Pit interrupted the sporting event. Finally, Cold helped Flash's cop allies when the **Rogues** and **Thinker** had taken control of both Keystone and Central City. That move ultimately paid off in a big way for Cold, as it allowed him to take control of the Rogues—and hopefully put Flash on ice for good!

Other major villains who have had Flash running in circles include the super-intelligent **Gorilla Grodd**, whose massive strength and awesome psychic powers make him the ultimate predator in a metahuman jungle. Then there's **Murmur**, a psychopathic killer who invented a deadly toxin capable of killing in minutes; a revamped **Weather Wizard**, who's now as devastating as a hurricane, a tsunami and a blizzard rolled into one; and **Cicada**, a madman who started a cult that actually worships the Flash by killing the people the Speedster once saved!

THE BAD: Abra Kadabra has proved to be every bit as obnoxious as his name implies, and God, that's a lot of obnoxious to live up to. He's so egotistical that he traveled back in time from the 64th Century to show off his fancy magic tricks for a more appreciative audience. Guess what, Abby? No one cares in this, or any, century. We hope you slice your throat doing a card trick.

Indicative of the pre-Crisis **Top**'s lameness, with a spinning top gimmick he became so sensitive to Flash's movements that his brain overheated and he died. The original **Trickster** utilized special boots to literally walk on air, but someone apparently forgot to tell him how utterly useless that is, unless you wash windows. That's a career opportunity he may want to explore if this whole F.B.I. agent thing doesn't pan out.

THE UGLY: How ugly could **Rainbow Raider** possibly be? So ugly that current *Flash* writer Geoff Johns killed him off rather than try and work with him. A sound choice, as that would be the equivalent of trying to mold a vase out of a steaming pile of poo. Roy G. Bivolo was a colorblind artist who became embittered when he realized that such a combination is hardly conducive to success. Resorting to strapping on "rainbow goggles" that granted him rainbows to ride on, he went about stealing art so no one could enjoy it. What a friggin' brat!

SPEED DEMONS (1) Captain Cold; (2) Trickster; (3) Abra Kadabra and (4) Rainbow Raider

THE X-MEN ROGUES

THE GOOD: No villain in the X-canon has attracted more trouble or repelled the Merry Mutants more than the Master of Magnetism.

Magneto typifies the kind of mutant the X-Men were born to battle—he not only wants to see Homo Superior flourish, he wants them to usurp humanity as the dominant species on Earth. And he's not afraid to destroy a few million humans to see that goal come to fruition.

Magneto was the first mutant supervillain the X-Men ever battled, and his first foray against humanity should tell you everything you need to know about him—he attempted to hijack a load of nuclear missiles to use against human targets. The X-Men would ultimately thwart his mad scheme, but that incident set the stage for what would become a lifelong battle between the pacifistic Professor X and the victory-by-any-means-necessary approach of Magneto.

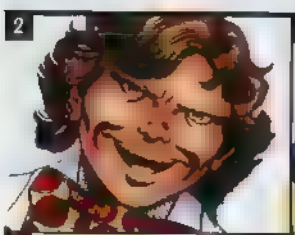
If there's one thing in common that most X-villains have, it's that they believe in big body counts. For example, **Dark Phoenix** wiped out billions of people on a faraway planet during one destructive rampage; **Cassandra Nova** annihilated 16 million mutants on the island nation of Genosha with an assault of hybrid Sentinels; and it's those same Sentinels who've captured and persecuted literally thousands of mutants across America.

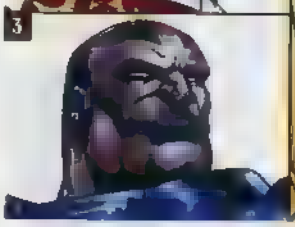
Throw in the unstoppable force of nature known as the **Juggernaut**, the insidious secret mutant society called the **Hellfire Club** or the reality-warping menace of **Proteus**, and it's easy to see that being the next step in evolution brings you one step closer to death.

THE BAD: There's just something about a gigg..ng, murderous little man that makes our skin crawl. (David Spade, this role was meant for you.) **Arcade** is an imp who specializes in assassinations and ran the diabolical Murderworld "amusement" park. Talk about giving starry-eyed little kids nightmares.

The Brood fare no better. A drooling race of "Alien"-rip-offs with the single-minded goal of reproduction at any cost, they've thankfully disappeared. **Apocalypse** is an overgrown, immortal mutant, but that doesn't make him interesting. **Trevor Fitzroy** (green hair) and **Nimrod** (pink armor) screw with time and space to little effect, while the strangely non-suicidal **Black Tom** gets by controlling wood and plants. **Onslaught** was a portion of Xavier's psyche come to life, but not the party-hearty portion. Plus, he instigated "Heroes Reborn." Ugh.

THE UGLY: **Mojo** is ugly, all right...so ugly that certain hospitals substitute his picture in place of Ipecac to induce vomiting in the wee ones. The Mojos (may the sweet Lord have mercy, there's more than one) dwell on Mojoworld, a planet consumed with being consistently entertained. The irony of this tub of pus demanding entertainment is apparently lost only on him.





X-TREME BADDIES (1) Magneto; (2) Arcade; (3) Apocalypse and (4) Mojo

2 BATMAN ROGUES

THE GOOD: When it comes to the **Joker**, Batman doesn't get the joke.

Over the course of the last 62 years, the Joker's killed the second Robin (Jason Todd), kidnapped hundreds of babies and even murdered Commissioner James Gordon's wife with no ultimate goal, save one—throw some chaos into the orderly world of Gotham's Dark Knight Detective.

During one if his most sinister and insane routines, the Joker came closer than ever to pushing Batman and Gordon over the edge of sanity and legality

Deciding that he'll show the world that anyone—even top cop Jim Gordon—can be driven mad under the right circumstances, the Clown Prince of Crime shoots the commissioner's niece Barbara Gordon (a.k.a. the first Batgirl) through the spine, paralyzing her. Then, he photographs her naked, bloody body as she writhes in pain on the floor and makes Gordon view every silent frame—one by one.

In the process, Gordon goes almost catatonic and Batman, after seeing Barbara in the hospital, wants the Joker's head. It's only Gordon's weary words that bring Batman back from the brink of ending the Joker's reign of insanity forever: "I want him brought in and I want him brought in by the book," says Gordon "We have to show him our way works!"

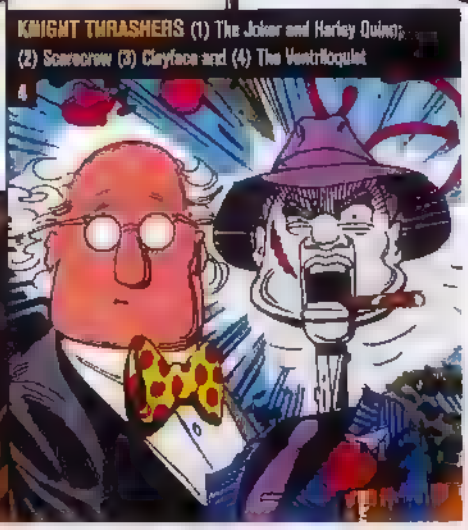
No other villain approaches the Joker's sadistic style, but **Ra's Al Ghul**, who's stolen the corpses of Bruce Wayne's mother and father and got the Dark Knight kicked out of the JLA, comes close. An immortal, would-be world conqueror, Ra's always heaves some heated drama into Batman's life since his not-quite-as-evil daughter **Talia** is torn between her father's ideals and her hots for Bats.

A former confidant to Batman as Harvey Dent, **Two-Face** has long been a thorn in the hero's side. **Catwoman**, supposedly now reformed as a cat burglar, works her womanly wiles to seduce and use Batman for her own gain. Then there's **Killer Croc**, whose size and reptilian instinct always push Batman to the limit, or **Poison Ivy**, who uses her pheromones to entice the entire Bat-family into being her unwilling pawns. **Scarecrow**'s fear gas has caused more trouble in Gotham than a union strike. **Harley Quinn**'s just as dangerous as the Joker, even when she's on her own. Last but not least, there's **Deadshot**, a hired gun whose uncanny aim always draws a bead on Batman

THE BAD: Like pizza and prison fornication, even when a Batman villain is bad, he's still pretty good. Nonetheless, we take no shame in reporting that the **Penguin** waddles to the front of the line as the lamest Bat-heckler out there

Let's break the stout little tub of flub down: He's too short to get on any amusement park rides, and that, coupled with some dementia, means he goes prancing about shoving trick umbrellas in people's faces. **Clayface** takes it one step further by at least being a physical threat, but it's hard to respect a guy whose expressions melt off. **Riddler** has a completely different gimmick from the Joker (riddles, not jokes; see?) but could benefit from a stronger case of the crazies. The **KGBeast** thinks he can just waltz into the U.S. and go shooting at capitalist pigs. **Bane** will go down in the annals of comic history as a juice monster who got in one lucky break.

THE UGLY: Oh, won't this nasty case of The Lame ever go away? **The Ventriloquist** goes by Arnie Wesker, a little nebbish who doesn't go schizo until he makes with the dummy Scarface and performs a weak routine. We admit, this would be scarier in person, especially if we were home alone and he broke in and started the whole schpiel at our bedside.



KNIGHT THRASHERS (1) The Joker and Harley Quinn; (2) Scarecrow (3) Clayface and (4) The Ventriloquist

1 SPIDER-MAN ROGUES

THE GOOD: A lot of villains make their superhero showdowns intense and deadly, but the **Green Goblin** was the first to make it personal.

Always a threat, the Green Goblin's had many incarnations, including Norman's son (and Peter's best friend) Harry, but it was always the elder Osborn who posed the most trouble for Peter Parker. His most heinous and memorable act took place in *Amazing Spider-Man* #121-#122, when the Goblin inflicted his most crushing blow to Spider-Man *and* Peter Parker by launching Peter's then-girlfriend Gwen Stacy off the top of one of New York's largest bridges. The fall killed Gwen and ripped out Spider-Man's heart.

Of course, the Green Goblin's not the only freak hunting for Spider-Man's head. One of Spidey's greatest villains doesn't wear a costume—only a Hitler mustache and the title of *Daily Bugle* Publisher. From claiming Spider-Man was a villain to trying to uncover his secret identity, no one's caused more trouble for Spider-Man than **J. Jonah Jameson**. Even after 40 years, the crusty curmudgeon still wages a virtual one-man war against Manhattan's "menace."

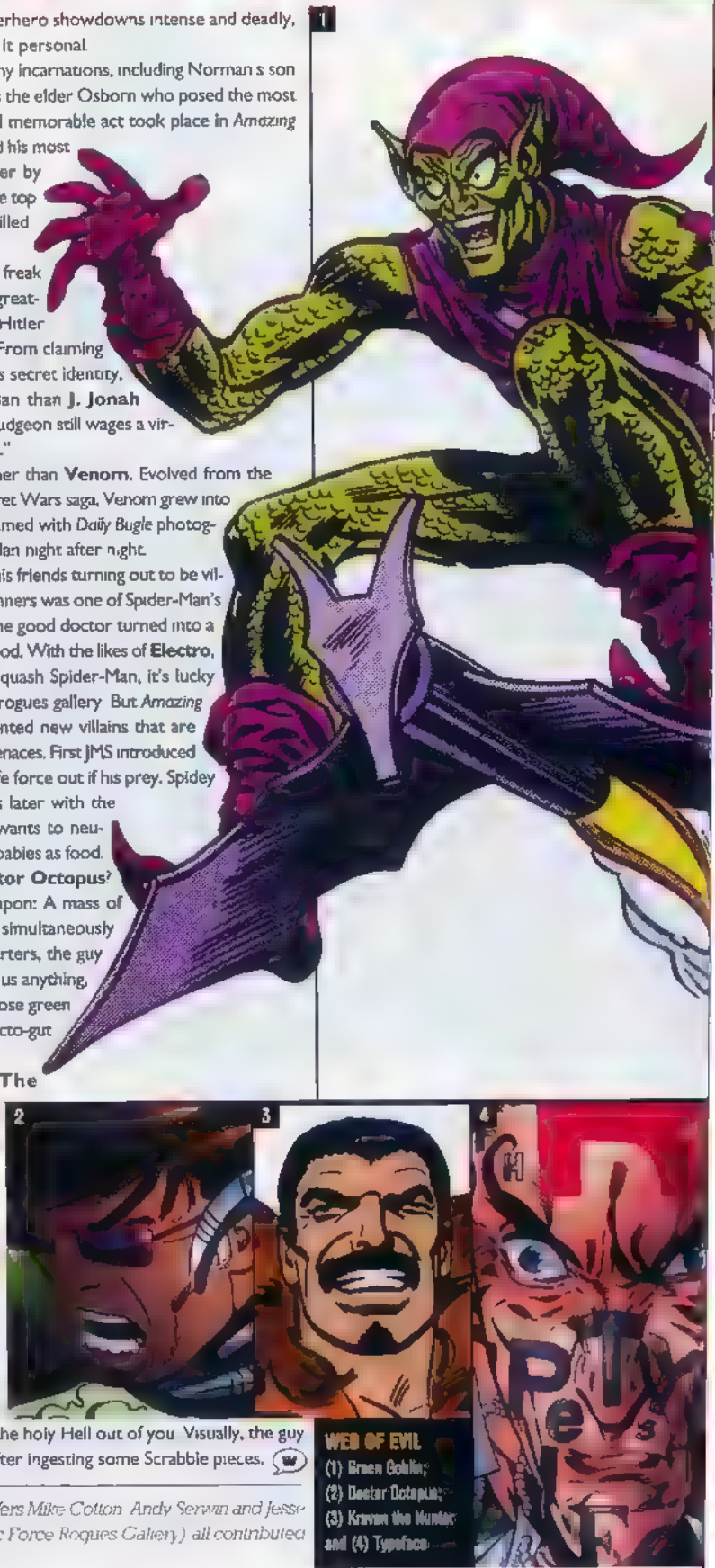
For villains with pure power, look no further than **Venom**. Evolved from the symbiote costume Spidey dawned during the Secret Wars saga, Venom grew into Spider-Man's polar opposite as the symbiote teamed with *Daily Bugle* photographer Eddie Brock and began hunting Spider-Man night after night.

One of Spidey's biggest problems has been his friends turning out to be villains. Just look at **the Lizard**: Scientist Curt Conners was one of Spider-Man's closest allies, but after a dose of reptile DNA, the good doctor turned into a savage man-sized lizard with a Jones for Spidey blood. With the likes of **Electro**, **Sandman** and **Scorpion** always looking to squash Spider-Man, it's lucky there's any room for new villains in the hero's rogues gallery. But *Amazing Spider-Man* writer J. Michael Straczynski's invented new villains that are almost eclipsing some of the character's oldest menaces. First JMS introduced **Morlun**, a vampire-like villain that sucked the life force out of his prey. Spidey found himself locked in combat a few months later with the **Spider-Wasp**, an otherworldly female who wants to neutralize Spider-Man before sharing him with her babies as food.

THE BAD: What are we to make of **Doctor Octopus**? Certainly, Otto Octavius wields a mighty weapon: A mass of metal tentacles that can check your oil while simultaneously smacking your face. So why is he here? For starters, the guy is, at heart, a fat loser. And if high school taught us anything, it's that fat losers are to be mocked. Second, those green tights are just unsightly. Spandex and a swelling octo-gut don't mix.

Like so many other bad rogues, **The Tarantula**, a Spanish nuisance with poison tips on his boots, relies on the cheesy 'stache to appear terrifying. **Kraven the Hunter** blew his brains out, so that about says it all. **Carnage**? Call him Venom dumbed-down for the real ADD-stricken readers. **Vulture**? Another old man with dreams of recapturing his youth. **Tombstone** made a name for himself as the toughest albino around. You hang onto that title for as long as you want, sport. Don't think it's goin' anywhere.

THE UGLY: **Typeface** crafts letters that have different purposes: Some cut you, others spell out various ills, and still others will bore the holy Hell out of you. Visually, the guy resembles nothing so much as a splat of bile after ingesting some Scrabble pieces. (W)



Freelance writer Jake Rossen and Wizard staffers Mike Cotton, Andy Serwin and Jesse Thompson (otherwise known as the Fantastic Force Rogues Gallery) all contributed to this feature.

COMING attracti

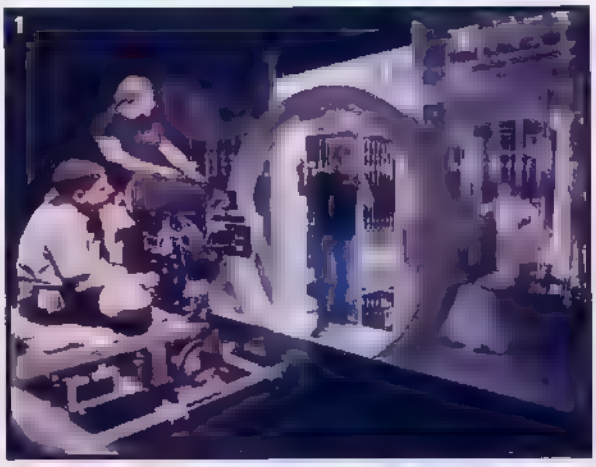
'X-MEN 2' NEWS AND VIEWS!

With 'X-Men 2' wrapped, director Bryan Singer's back in L.A. putting the final touches on the film before it debuts on May 2, 2003

Calling the highly anticipated X Men sequel, "the 'Empire Strikes Back' of the 'X-Men' saga," Singer's keeping most of what goes on in the film a closely guarded secret. But the 37-year old director did provide *Wizard* with a few choice stills for what may turn into one of the biggest movie franchises of all time.

1) With a budget that's well over $100 million, Singer says 20th Century Fox and Marvel Studios' "X-Men 2" is light years beyond the first "X-Men" film. The director was given much more freedom when it came to high-end special effects, getting a longer shooting schedule from Fox and constructing new locations for the film, which included rebuilding the entire set for Magneto's "Plastic Prison."

2 A-B) Reprising his role as Magneto, actor Ian McKellen ("The Two Towers") won't spend much time in his character's prison cell if rumors are true. According to the actor, his character and his relationship to X-Men founder Charles Xavier (played by Patrick Stewart, "Star Trek: Nemesis") evolve in the second film. "It's not so much that their relationship changes as it's a different way these two men relate," says the star.



HOLLYWOOD AND TV STUFF THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

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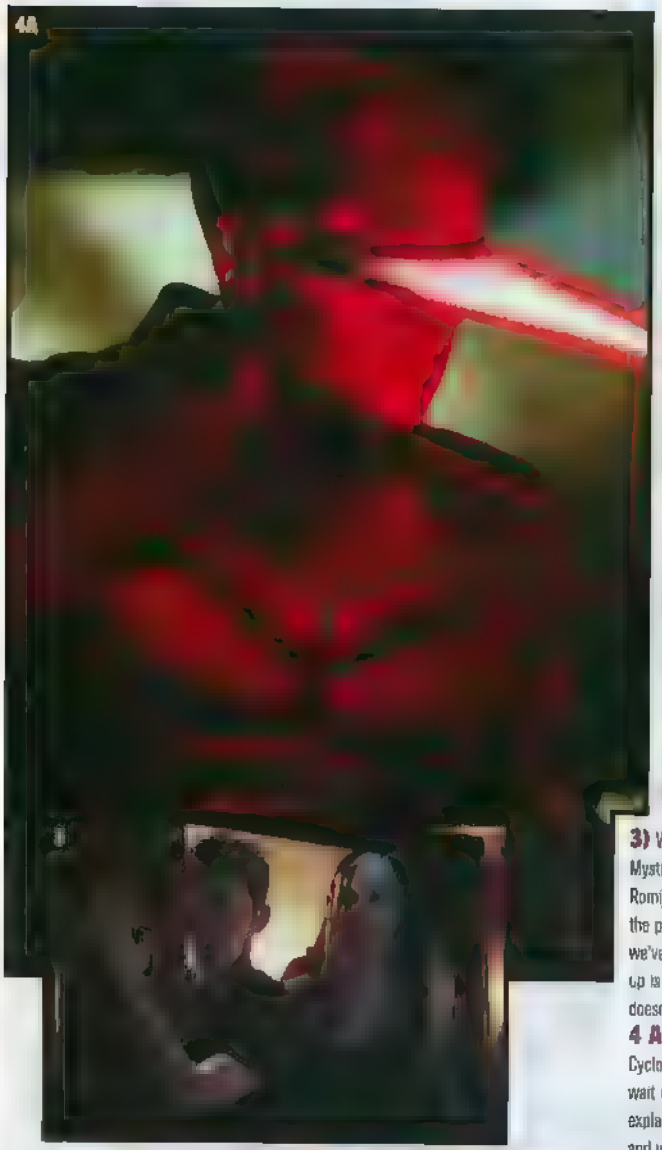
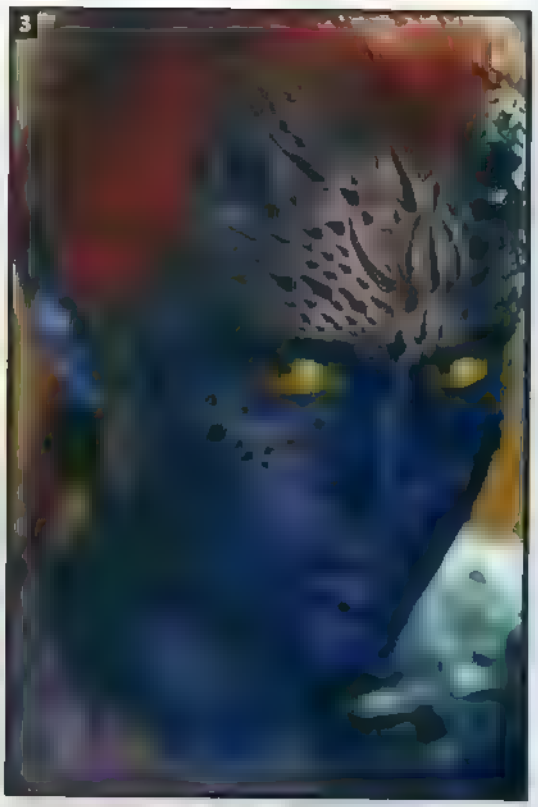
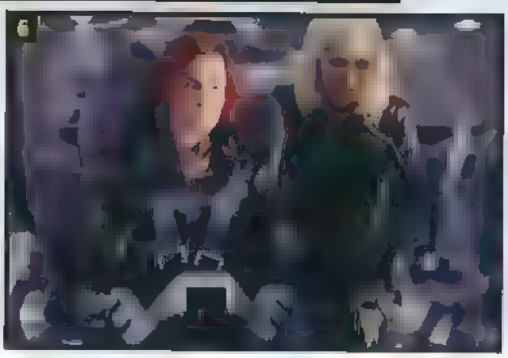






All X-Men 2 photos courtesy of 20th Century Fox.

3) With both Sabretooth and Toad sitting out "X-Men 2," Rebecca Romijn-Stamos' Mystique is the only henchman of Magneto to return in the sequel. According to Romijn-Stamos, who's painted blue everyday for her role, the production has refined the painting process since the first film. "They've completely changed the process and we've gotten it down to under four hours now," reveals Romijn-Stamos. "And the clean-up is a lot better. I don't get sick like I did last time. I still have the blue in my ears, it doesn't come out."

4 A-B) With a streamlined visor, James Marsden ("Disturbing Behavior") returns as Cyclops in "X-Men 2." The actor says if fans think "X-Men" was action-packed, just wait until they lay eyes on its sequel. "I think a lot of the first [film] was devoted to explaining to the audience members who the X-Men were, what they were capable of and what their story was," explains Marsden. "I think we've gotten that out of the way now. So we can see these characters kind of spring into action and not have to worry about, 'Is everyone going to know who they are?' and what the situation is. I think now that we've established that, we can have some fun now."

5) Younger mutants get a bigger role in "X-Men 2," especially Shawn Ashmore's ("Animorphs") Iceman and Anna Paquin's ("The Piano") Rogue. The two, along with Aaron Stanford's ("Tadpole") Pyro, form a steamy love triangle that even Ashmore's not sure he can talk about. "I really don't want to give too much away," says the young star. "But obviously we play off the fire and ice relationship between Pyro and Iceman."

6) Expect recent Oscar winner Halle Berry to receive a beefed-up role in "X-Men 2." Seen here with co-star Famke Janssen's Jean Grey, Berry's Storm will be much more aggressive in the second film, according to Singer. "Like she tells Wolverine in the first film, it's time to choose a side," explains Singer. "She's definitely chosen a side." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

TRAILERS...

AQUAMAN At the November Mid-Ohio Con, Warner Bros. Animation Producer Alan Burnett confirmed that "Aquaman" is being developed as a series set to air on Kids' WB!

CONAN Conan Properties (owners of the barbarian) has reportedly declined to renew film rights to Warner Bros. or producers The Wachowski Brothers ("The Matrix"). "King Conan: Crown of Iron," which was to star returning Cimmerian Arnold Schwarzenegger, looks dead.

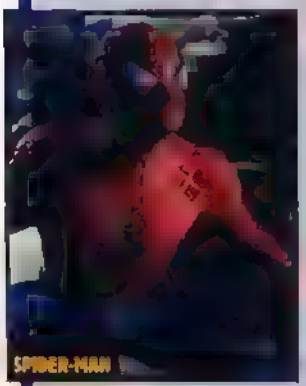
CONSTANTINE Keanu Reeves begins filming the adaptation of DC/Vertigo's Hellblazer in late 2003 for Warner Bros.

GHOST RIDER Nicolas Cage now says the film is back on track, with a script due to Columbia Pictures in early 2003. "I always thought it was interesting," Cage said online. "The concept of making a deal with [the devil] and then trying to do something positive with it."

HELLBOY At press time, two additions have been made to the cast: John Hurt ("Harry Potter") will play Prof. Bruttenholm, while Larry Miller ("10 Things I Hate About You") portrays Dr. Manning.

INCREDIBLE HULK Anchor Bay will release the two classic 1980s "Incredible Hulk" teleflicks, "The Incredible Hulk Returns" (featuring Thor) and "The Trial of the Incredible Hulk" (featuring Daredevil), in a two-disc DVD set on May 6.

IRON MAN The "Buffy" creator has left the film project to focus on his various TV series.

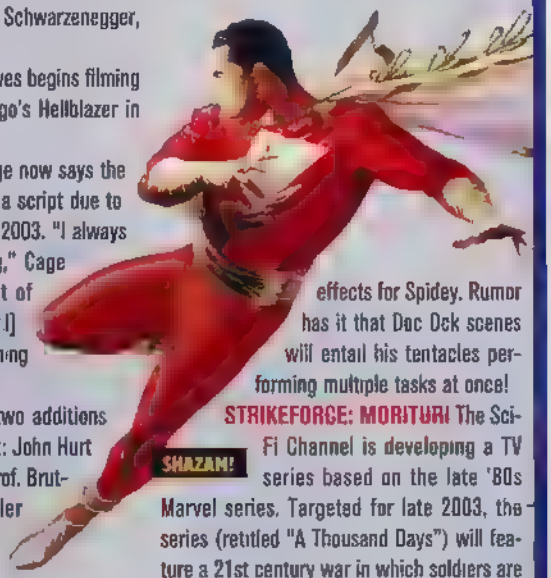

SPIDER-MAN

NOBLE CAUSES Illuminati Entertainment has optioned TV rights to Jay Faerber's Image Comics title.

PUNISHER Rapper Busta Rhymes said in an interview that he's been offered a role in the film.

SHAZAM! New Line has teamed with DC Comics for a feature film based on the original Captain Marvel character. "Batman" exec Michael Uslan is heading up the project.

SPIDER-MAN 2 According to actor Ted Raimi (brother of "Spider-Man" director Sam Raimi, and who plays Hoffman in the film), some shooting has begun for "The Amazing Spider-Man," even though Michael Chabon's script hasn't been completed. Returning director Raimi wants Dr. Octopus (the film's main villain) to have mechanical tentacles whenever possible, saving the CGI


SHAZAM!

effects for Spidey. Rumor has it that Doc Ock scenes will entail his tentacles performing multiple tasks at once!

STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI The Sci-Fi Channel is developing a TV series based on the late '80s Marvel series. Targeted for late 2003, the series (retitled "A Thousand Days") will feature a 21st century war in which soldiers are enhanced with superpowers but have a lifespan of 1,000 days.

SUPERMAN Rumors abound that Jim Caviezel ("Frequency"), Mark Ruffalo ("You Can Count On Me") and Dominic Purcell ("John Doe") are up to play the Man of Steel. Director Brett Ratner ("Red Dragon") also said in published reports that he's considering Charlie Sheen to play Lex Luthor! Other casting rumors include Jeremy Piven ("Black Hawk Down") as Jimmy Olsen. Anthony Hopkins is locked in as Jor-El.

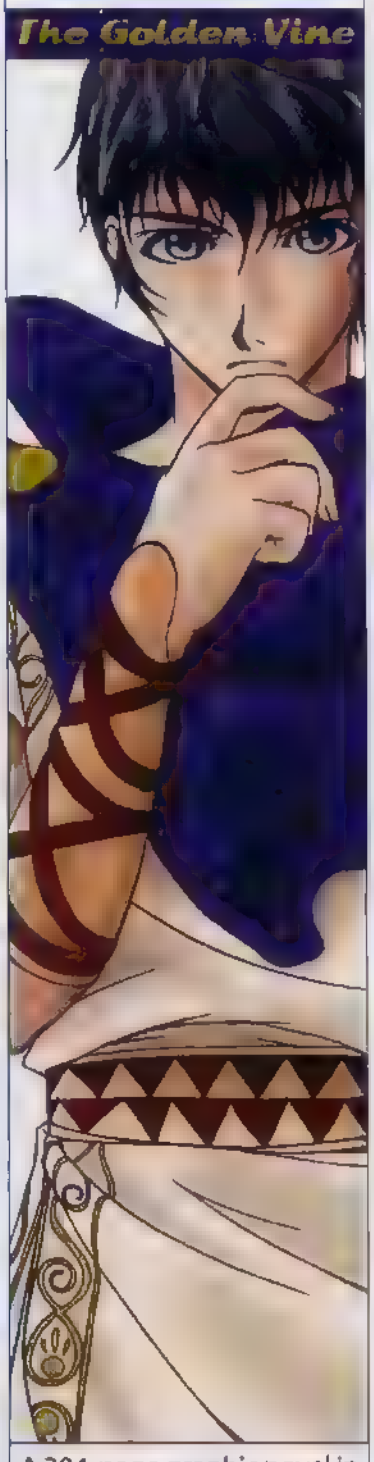
TOMB RAIDER 2 Filming for "Tomb Raider 2: Cradle of Life" has begun in Greece, and get this: The sequel will feature Angelina Jolie riding a jet ski in a bikini!

TUROK Adam Beach ("Smoke Signals") and "Attack of the Clones" star Hayden Christensen have reportedly teamed as producers on the comic book/computer game property, which finds a new Turok in college uncovering his destiny as a dinosaur hunter.

X-MEN 3 While not in "X2," Tyler Mane (Sabretooth in "X-Men") said in online reports that he's signed on for not one, but TWO more X-sequels! ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

shoto press

History changes course this month.



A 304-page graphic novel in glorious color and gold ink.

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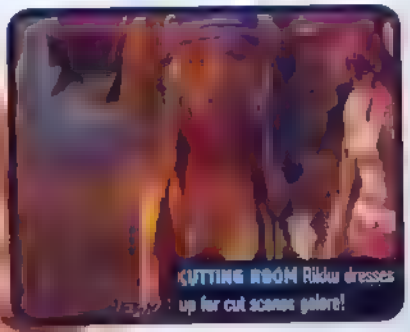
NOT-SO-FINAL FANTASY

Square Electronic Arts releases true sequel to 'FFX'

Why bother calling it "Final" anymore? If there's one sure bet in the video game biz, it's that the next installment in the mega-popular Final Fantasy series is always *juuuuust* around the corner. And in 2003, Square Electronic Arts sticks to that wildly successful formula with a twist: introducing *Final Fantasy X-2*, the follow-up to last year's award-winning *Final Fantasy X*—and the first true sequel in the FF series. That's right, no brand-new cast of characters, no strange new world to discover. For the first time ever, fans triumphantly return to the familiar setting of a previous FF favorite.

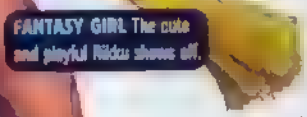
The beautiful summoner Yuna—sporting an ultra-sexy new costume!—stars as the leading lady of a brand-new adventure set in the world of Spira. Two years after Yuna and friends saved Spira from the threat of Sin, the world enjoys an era of "Eternal Calm." Free from the tyrannical rule of the anti-technology Yevon, the use of machina is no longer considered evil and the people of Spira prosper. But the calm is disturbed when Yuna's former guardian Rikku shows up with a mystical sphere, along with a vision of someone who looks an awful lot like Tidus, the hero of the first game—setting Yuna off on a personal quest to find her lost love.



CUTTING ROOM Rikku dresses up for cut scenes galore!

Can't believe the soft-spoken Yuna's vampy new look? Relax, she's still the same sweet summoner you know and love. The scandalously short shorts and dual pistols are part of Yuna's disguise as she travels incognito through Spira. Her companions include some familiar faces: the bouncy Rikku (also sporting sexier new duds) and the protective black mage Lulu definitely return, with other *FFX* favorites sure to follow. Rumor has it Khimari and Wakka are also in there. And a powerful new character named Pain is set to join the girls-only cast.

CREATURE FEATURE Discover a host of new lifeforms on Spira.



FANTASY GIRL The cute and playful Rikku shows off.

The world of Spira also features a cool mix of old and new. Familiar locations like Kilika and the Mi'ihen Highroad remain on the map, but show significant changes from the original. The map itself is

SNEAK PEEK With Konami's *Batman: Dark Tomorrow* game just about to hit consoles everywhere, we thought you would be excited to see the excellent design and ideas that went into the first *real* Batman comic book based video game in a decade!

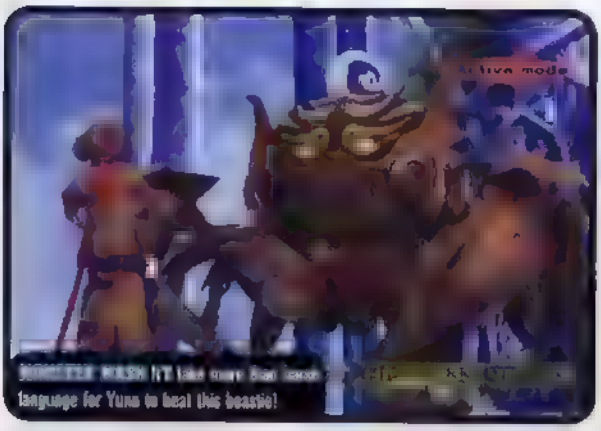
STAND OFF Batman and Joker

ARKHAM TENCH by Christopher Moeller

GROWLER Yuna's all about getting the bling-bling.

expanded, with plenty of exciting new towns and locales for players to get lost in. With so much to explore and rediscover, Spira might as well be a completely new world.

True to Final Fantasy tradition, *X-2* revolutionizes the world of RPG gameplay yet again with a host of new and improved features. A still-in-the-works development system replaces the Sphere Grid of the first game, and a revamped battle system features a sleek new Active Mode (minus Overdrives and Overkills) for faster, more realistic fisticuffs. The revamped World Map expands the characters' range of motion to include running, jumping and climbing, and a new



MONSTER MASH It'll take more than swearing language for Yuna to beat this beastie!

airship, the Celsius, completes the travel overhaul. The classification system also gets an upgrade, with a bunch of new job classes like "gunner," "mascot" and even "pop star" that players can explore using the Job Wheel system from Final Fantasy Tactics. And to top it all off, Square promises "stunning transformation sequences rivaling those found in *Final Fantasy X*."

Excited yet? Good, but you're gonna have to wait. *Final Fantasy X-2* hits Japan in March 2003, but plans for the American release haven't been finalized...yet. ■ **RICHARD NO**

videorumblings

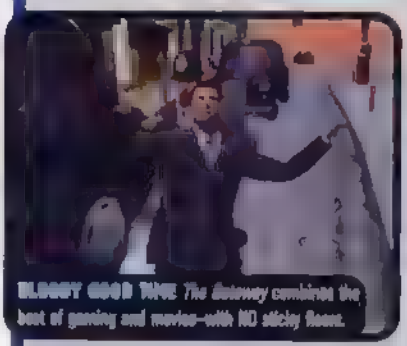
BITS AND BYTES!

MASTERS OF THE VIDEO GAME After a toy relaunch from Mattel, a TV resurrection on Cartoon Network and a new Image Comics series, the prince of Eternia continues his conquest with a *Masters of the Universe* video game release in late 2003, courtesy of TDK Mediactive. The as-yet-untitled game follows last year's hit for the Game Boy Advance (also from TDK Mediactive), but the console version (available for PS2, Xbox, and GAMECUBE platforms) stands alone as a completely separate adventure. The new console games are based on Mattel's updated character designs from the new action figures. Though the exact release date, story details and gameplay features are still unknown, TDK plans to tune the game's debut with the second season of Cartoon Network's "He-Man and the Masters of the Universe." A sequel to the Game Boy Advance release also hits stores around that time.

COMIC GAMES?

NEXT TO BE THERE Sweet Mandalorian armor!

We've seen games based on comic book heroes and comic adaptations of video games, but the latest trend seems to be whole comic books (individual AND entire runs) as [illegible] the game! Some need to be earned and are brand new for the game itself, like in *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* (GC, PS2, and Xbox). In *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter* (PS2 and GC), the comics are digital reprints of the Dark Horse limited series *Jango Fett: Open Seasons*, featuring the Mandalorian's origin story. And even more in-depth is the *Sonic Mega Collection* (GAMECUBE), which features EVERY *Sonic the Hedgehog* comic ever printed by Archie Comics! A similar feature was used in the PS1 *Spider-Man* game, where you could find comic books in the game and get the history of the Spidey's last 40 years. Let's hope we see more of the same in upcoming *Hulk* and *Daredevil* games.

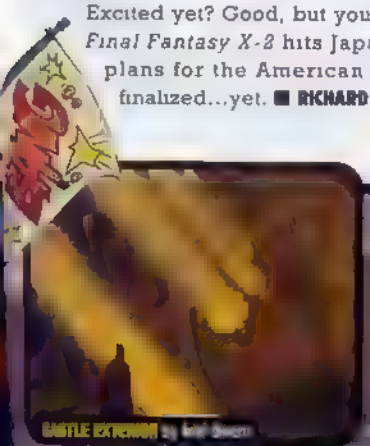


BLOODY GOOD TIME *The Getaway* combines the best of gaming and movies—with NO sticky floors.

SONY AIMS HIGH

With such big releases as *Primal* (where you take on the role of [illegible] half-hot chick/half-demon with a Gargoyle sidekick) what more could Sony do to make gamers giddy? *The Getaway* for the PS2 may be the game to blur the line between games and movies. Featuring real actors in digital form with an in-depth script, professional wardrobe designers, not to mention a fully realized London, England, in which players can shoot, loot and use the kind of four-letter language that all the great English-gangster films are infamous for.

■ **MIKEY BENCK**



BATTLE ENGINE by Ariel Swartz

BATMAN by Ariel Swartz

ARKHAM PRISONER by Takeshi Okamoto

manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIME NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

TSUNAMI SPLASH

Marvel catches a wave of new manga-influenced books

Marvel Comics is bracing for a wave so big, it's been upgraded to a tsunami.

Starting in April, the House of Ideas will launch Tsunami, a brand new wave of manga-influenced comics splashing into every corner of the Marvel Universe.

"We were basically talking about this as a new Marvel wave," explained Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "And then we realized that we had so many Japanese or Japanese-influenced artists coming onboard, and we thought, 'Well, what's the Japanese term for wave?' And that's how Tsunami was born."

While some of the new ongoing titles (like *Venom*, *Namor* and *Human Torch*) will kick-start older properties with a distinctly manga feel, others (*Sentinel* and *Runaways*) will sport never-before-seen characters and situations. But all (with the exception of *Manga Wolverine*) will take place in normal Marvel continuity—not Marvel's "Mangaverse."

Tsunami would never have gotten off the ground without the efforts of Marvel's resident manga guy, editor C.B. Cebulski—the man responsible for bringing Kia Asamiya to *Uncanny X-Men*. "You're finally seeing the effect of C.B. Cebulski being at Marvel," said Quesada. For Cebulski, Tsunami was the perfect chance to achieve a lifelong goal.

"I wanted to take my love of American comics, combine it with my love of Japanese manga and anime and the connections I have over there, and come up with a product that will appeal to both audiences," said Cebulski. To that end, Cebulski recruited rising stars from Japan, including renowned manga artists Tsutomu Nihei (*Blame!*) and Mizuki Sakakibara, to team up with up-and-coming American writers like Brian Vaughan and Sean McKeever.

"If comics had a farm team, you're starting to see our farm team sluggers come out," gushed Quesada about his writers. "Guys like Daniel Way, Brian Vaughan and Sean McKeever. This is the next wave. You wanna know who the next Brian Michael Bendis is? Well, you'll see him in Tsunami."

More Tsunami launches are planned throughout the summer—but in the meantime, here's a look at the first wave.

HUMAN TORCH By Karl Kesel and Skottie Young
Johnny Storm gets completely redefined in this solo series starring the hotheaded hero. Expect more emphasis to be placed on his fire-like qualities.

MANGA WOLVERINE By Daniel Way and Tsutomu Nihei
Tsutomu Nihei, creator of the critically-acclaimed manga series *Blame!*, pits Wolverine against parasitic robots in a frantic-paced battlefest.

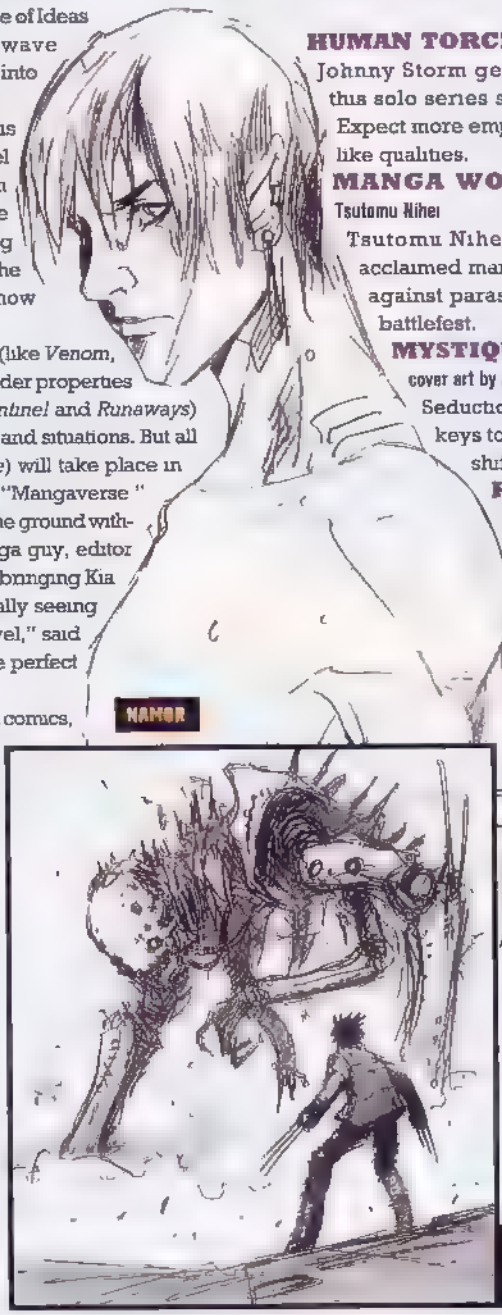
MYSTIQUE By Brian Vaughan and Jorge Lucas, cover art by Joseph Michael Linsner
Seduction, intrigue and power are the keys to this series, as the sexy shape-shifting mutant goes solo.

RUNAWAYS By Brian Vaughan and Adrian Alphona
Six kids try to make amends for their parents' dark secret in a series that mixes "Smallville" with a touch of "Harry Potter."

SENTINEL By Sean McKeever and Udon Studios
Young Juston Seyfert discovers the wreck of a Sentinel in his family's salvage yard, leading to all sorts of mechanical trouble.

VENOM By Daniel Way and Francisco Herrera
One of Spidey's deadliest villains returns, but this time *he's* the one on the run from a tireless enemy.

NAMOR By Bill Jemas, Andy Watson and Mizuki Sakakibara
A relaunch harking back to the Prince of Atlantis' early days as a child. The debut issue is only 25 cents! ■ RICHARD HO



WAY OUT Newcomer Daniel Way pens the crazy manga adventures of Wolverine.

ANIME BUZZBOX

HE'S A CHEEKY BOY Alright, alright... maybe it's not exactly ground-breaking news that the cover to Dark Horse Comics' recent collection of the best-known anime character, *Astro Boy #7*, has a pic of Astro utilizing his patented ass-mounted machine guns, but we love this picture. Who wouldn't love to have their own ass-mounted machine guns?

CLAMP IT DOWN Fans of *shôjo* manga (or "comics for girls") know the name of CLAMP, the near-superhuman, four-girl manga-producing queens of Japan. TokyoPop has snagged five of their titles for release. The titles include the kid-friendly mysteries of *CLAMP School Detectives*, the romantic comedy *The Man of Many Faces*, the wacky high school-students-defend-the-Earth-from-aliens *Dukiyon: CLAMP School Defenders*, the ludicrously sexy retelling of Alice's tales *Miyuki-chan in Wonderland* and *Shirahime-syo: Snow Goddess Tales*, an anthology of Japanese folktales. While no release dates have been determined, all five titles are expected to ship throughout the course of 2003.

HORSE FEATHERS Missed the first issue of the ridiculously beautiful *Ghost in the Shell 2: Man-Machine Interface*? Well, you can dry your tears, because Dark Horse will be re-releasing it in March with a special holographic cover. The Motoko's have never looked sexier! And on a classical note, in April, DH will bring over *Metropolis*, the manga from *Astro Boy* creator and "God of Manga" Osamu Tezuka, which was recently turned into an anime movie in 2001.

MAID FOR AMERICA *Evangelion* might be confused, after all, *Maharomatic-Combat Maid*, the latest offering from GAINAX, *Evangelion*'s famous anime studio, is just one of those sexy-combat-robot-turns-maid-for-teenage-boy that seem to be all the rage in Japan. However, GAINAX has turned the sexy-robot-maid anime on its ear, just like they did with the giant-robot genre in *Evangelion*. Expect deep philosophizing, heavy themes, tons of high-octane action and then some nudity.

BEBOP BACKS UP The eagerly anticipated *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*, once due for a February release, has been pushed back to April 4, 2003. Set between episodes 22 and 23 of the hit TV show, Spike and the Bebop crew have to stop a terrorist from covering Mars in a deadly neuro-toxin.

SPIRITED AWAY WOES The latest masterpiece from the Steven Spielberg of Japan, Hayao Miyazaki, hasn't had much luck. Besides a lackluster rollout from Disney, the nation of Japan has now decided to submit a live-action film called "Out" for consideration as Best Foreign Film in the Academy Awards this spring. Meanwhile, a class-action lawsuit has been filed in Japan against Disney (who produced the "Spirited Away" DVD), saying that the DVDs are defective because of heavy red tinting. Disney denies any problem, but over 100,000 people have joined the lawsuit. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

ANIME AIRWAVES

ADV to air 24-hour Anime Network

It's a good time to be an anime fan, especially if you're a lazy one. Tentatively set to premiere in early 2003, the Anime Network will debut as its own 24-hour cable station.

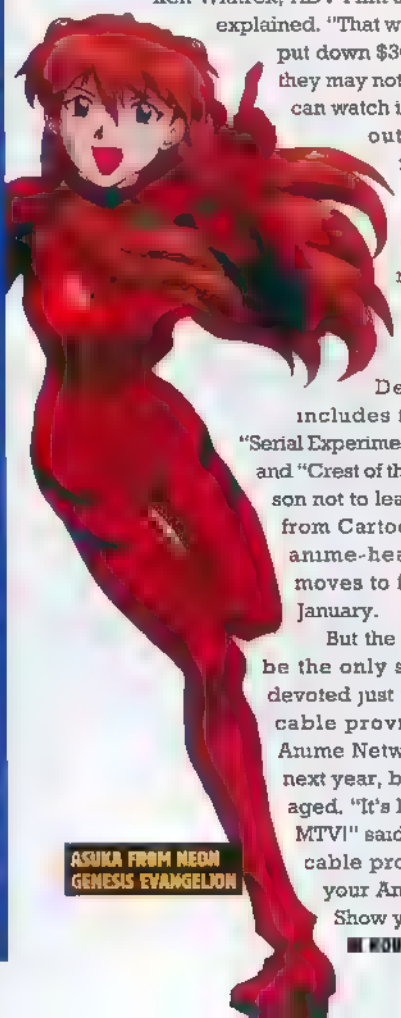
The Anime Network plans to feature programming blocks for Action, a Martial Arts/Horror category, one for Science Fiction and a Comedy zone as well. The shows and movies will come from ADV Films' extensive catalog of anime titles meaning hits like "Neon Genesis Evangelion," "Gunsmith Cats," "Getter Robo" and "Excel Saga" will finally have a chance to premiere on U.S. television.

"Not only will the Anime Network have staple titles, it will premiere titles that aren't available on home video yet," promised John Ledford, president of ADV Films. First up is the hit Japanese series "RahXephon," a giant robot/character drama hailed as the successor to "Evangelion."

Perhaps the best news for anime fans is that the Anime Network plans to show these titles uncut and uncensored. However, in order to attract the widest audience, ADV plans to show dubbed versions of the anime, rather than subtitled.

"The purpose of the Anime Network is to bring anime to 85 million homes, and introduce it to a whole new audience," explained Ledford.

"And the anime fans can use it to learn about new genres they might want to try, or don't know about yet," Ken Wiatrek, ADV Film's marketing director explained. "That way fans don't have to put down $30 for a DVD of a title they may not be sure about. They can watch it for free, and figure out what they want for themselves."



This comes hot on the heels of Tech TV's announcement of their Anime Unleashed programming block, which began on December 30 and includes fan-favorite series "Serial Experiment Lain," "Betterman" and "Crest of the Stars." Further reason not to leave the couch comes from Cartoon Network, whose anime-heavy "Adult Swim" moves to five days a week in January.

But the Anime Network will be the only station exclusively devoted just to anime. Not every cable provider will carry the Anime Network when it debuts next year, but don't get discouraged. "It's like the early days of MTV!" said Ledford. "Call your cable provider and demand your Anime Network today! Show your support!"

■ **ROUXAT KRICKEN**

BOOK of the MONTH!

THE AVENGERS

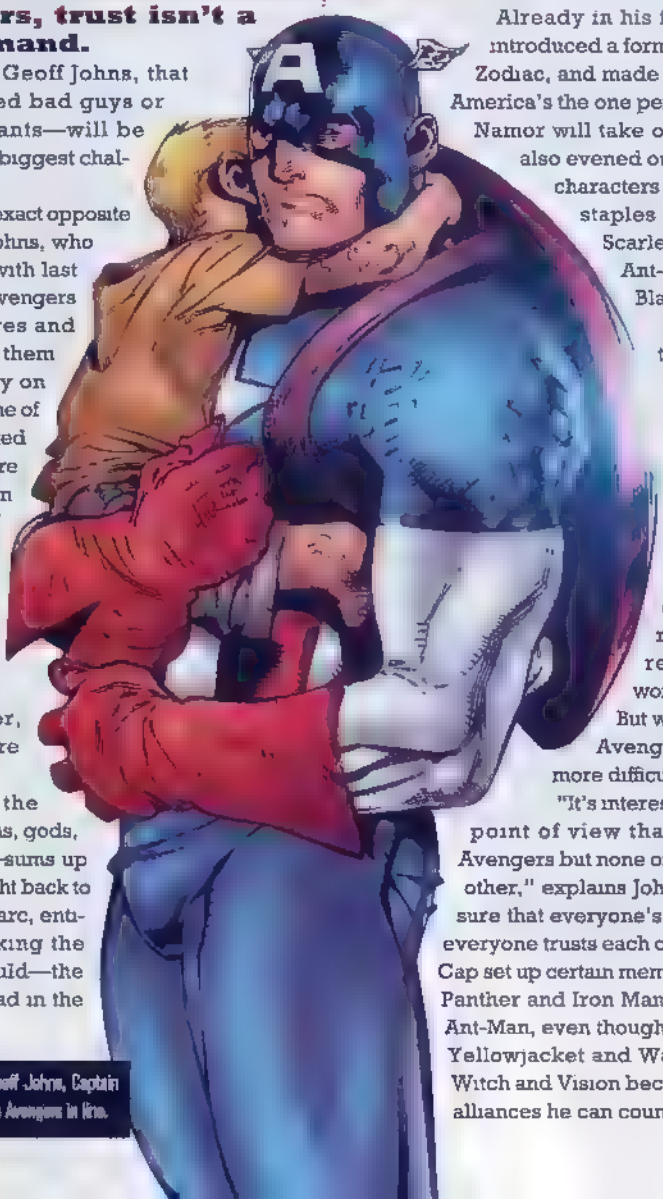
HOT WRITER GEOFF JOHNS FORCES EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES TO ASK THEMSELVES THE QUESTION: WHO DO YOU TRUST?

For the Avengers, trust isn't a given. It's a demand.

According to writer Geoff Johns, that trust—not superpowered bad guys or world-conquering mutants—will be Earth's Mightiest Heroes' biggest challenge in 2003

"The Avengers are the exact opposite of the X-Men," explains Johns, who took over *The Avengers* with last August's issue #57. "The Avengers protect a world that loves and believes and looks up to them That's got to weigh heavy on those shoulders. I think some of the members are intimidated by that burden and others are like, 'Of course they rely on me.' It's a huge range of egos and how does that affect one's ego? And how do you work with kings and gods? You've got three kings walking around Avengers' Mansion, for God's sake. Namor, Thor and Black Panther are all kings."

The grandeur of the Avengers—full of monarchs, gods, patriots and billionaires—sums up precisely what Johns brought back to the title with his first storyarc, entitled "World Trust," making the book feel the way it should—the biggest, most exciting read in the Marvel Universe.



AMERICAN STRATEGY Under writer Geoff Johns, Captain America acts as a watchdog to keep the Avengers in line.

Already in his first arc, Johns has reintroduced a formidable Scorpio and The Zodiac, and made sure fans know Captain America's the one person kings like Thor and Namor will take orders from The writer also evened out the team's lineup with characters ranging from Avengers' staples such as the Vision and Scarlet Witch to cult favorites Ant-Man, Jack of Hearts and Black Panther.

Johns has even made sure the Avengers truly stand as Earth's Mightiest Heroes, as the United Nations recognized the squad as a world power. Avengers Mansion now stands as an embassy on sovereign territory, giving the team members diplomatic privileges and responsibilities as the representatives of the world's "uniformed heroes." But with the world trusting the Avengers, things will only get more difficult for the team.

"It's interesting to look at it from the point of view that everyone trusts the Avengers but none of the Avengers trust each other," explains Johns. "Cap wants to make sure that everyone's on the same page—that everyone trusts each other. That's why you see Cap set up certain members together, like Black Panther and Iron Man and Jack of Hearts and Ant-Man, even though they hate it, but he puts Yellowjacket and Wasp together or Scarlet Witch and Vision because he knows those are alliances he can count on."

SUBMARINER'S FURY Namor may be king of Atlantis, but he gives way when Cap enters the room.

And the team will be tested with March's issue #66, which launches "Red Zone," a six-part story that has the Avengers facing a "biological terrorism" threat and which also introduces Olivier Coipel (*The Legion*) as the series' new regular penciler.

"They have to figure out the source, find out who did it, find out how to stop it—they have to work in a very different way than they normally do," reveals Johns. "And there's going to be a bunch of huge revelations in that arc as well. The trust theme will evolve also. Cap won't just decide that he has to make everyone trust each other and then everything is fine. It doesn't work out that well. Sometimes people can't work together."

Johns and Coipel work wonderfully together, according to *Avengers* editor Tom Brevoort, and he can't wait for fans to get their first full look at the artist's new spin on the Avengers.

"To me, it's similar to Jim Lee (*Batman*) coming on to *X Men* [in 1991]," says Brevoort. "Jim's *X-Men* had all the traits and strengths you'd associate with John Byrne's [classic] X-Men or Paul Smith's or John Romita Jr.'s—but Jim brought a modern sensibility to it, a flashy style, an energy and design sense. All of those things are the skills Olivier brings to *Avengers*. He's got a modern sensibility, a 21st-century style."

Fans also won't be let down by the In-Betweener's prophetic statement in November's *Avengers* #60, where he stated to the Avengers, "Your equal is coming, an evil as strong as your good. Many will die—including one of your own—and the need for avenging will arise."

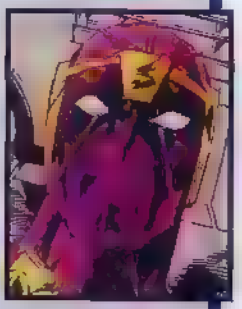
"I want to explore what 'avenging' means," expounds Johns. "Why call themselves Avengers if they're not avenging anything? I want to give them something to avenge. When it comes down to something really bad hitting the team hard, they have to say, 'We're Avengers, let's avenge this.' 'No, we can't go do that.' 'Why not?' 'Then why are we called Avengers?' That kind of thing. There's going to be some sh-- that hits the fan pretty hard next year."

And that's something fans can trust in. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

MORE REASONS TO READ THIS BOOK

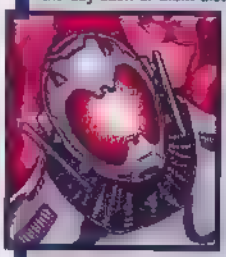
bookmarks

Writer Geoff Johns has built a rep of revamping bad guys into badasses on books such as DC's *Flash* and *JSA*. So we got his take on Earth's Mightiest Villains that could pop up in his current *Avengers* run.



MASTERS OF EVIL (led by Baron Zemo, right) "Any group of individuals who actually call themselves the 'MASTERS OF EVIL' has to be psychotic," Johns says of the Avengers' arch-nemeses. "They've taken the Avengers on before and always lost. So what do they want now? To 'win' against them? No. They know they're going to lose eventually. But before they're taken down, they want to *scar* the Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Put them through such horrifying things, physically and psychologically, that they'll never recover. They just want to be 'evil'—and when they're locked up in their padded rooms and concrete cells, they'll have the memories of destroying the Avengers' heroic innocence to keep them comfortable at night."

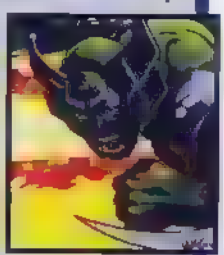
KANG "Why face the Avengers in the present when you can face them before they became Earth's Mightiest Heroes?" he says of the time traveling warlord. "If I were him, I'd make sure Tony Stark [Iron Man] never made it out of that terrorist camp and that Steve Rogers [Captain America] wasn't picked for the Super-Soldier program. Or if time was set, I'd go to the day each of them died and watch...just for fun."



ULTRON (left) "He's been used quite a bit, because he's a great character," he says of the twisted adamantium android spawned from the mistakes of founding member Hank Pym. "In this day and age, with computers running the world, Ultron is already there in the forefront. He just hasn't let anyone know yet."

COUNT NEFARIA "Count Nefaria's a former high-ranking member of the Maggia, a super-powered Mafia. Take the 'gang wars' of today but turn this into a 'gang war' between groups of supervillain hitmen. Living Laser could be the ultimate sniper–assassinating people from miles away, Radioactive Man could 'grow' lethal brain tumors in his targets, even the Gladiator could be a formidable bodyguard for Nefaria. Not that he needs one."

TIGER SHARK "Why hasn't this guy every bit someone's arm off?" he says of the aquatic killer. "In fact, I don't think I've ever seen him draw blood. Give him a taste for humans, let him loose in the harbor and watch the tourists run."



GRIM REAPER "Anyone calling themselves that has to be obsessed with death, especially since he's died and returned," says Johns, of this victim of jumbled continuity. "A death wish goes on in this guy's head, as he desperately wants to die at the hands of the Avengers. But what does he have to do to drive them to kill him?"

WHIRLWIND (above at right) "Tons of potential, lots of team history and [former *Avengers* artist] George Pérez did a cool redesign on his costume," he says of the human tornado. "Hmmm...wouldn't he make an interesting Avenger...?" ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

SECRET STASH

comics' hidden gems

THE INTERMAN

THE WORLD'S MOST ADAPTABLE HUMAN EMBARKS ON A GLOBE-TROTTING ADVENTURE OF SURVIVAL IN THIS 007-ESQUE THRILLER

THE DIRT The sole survivor of a top-secret Cold War experiment, Van Meach now possesses abilities far beyond those of normal humans, but being a man with animal survival techniques can attract some powerful enemies. See if Van can survive in Octopus Comics all-new graphic novel, *The Interman*, created by Jeff Parker.

DOYA LIKE? Mixing the worlds of Bond films, Tom Clancy novels and a character with abilities on par with the likes of Superman and the Taskmaster, *The Interman* serves up an intriguing, no-catching-your-breath adventure.

DIDJA KNOW? "I'll ask anybody I can find who's from an area for help when it comes to writing scenes in other countries," says Parker, a former storyboarder for the animated "The Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot" series. "There's a scene that takes place in Calcutta, and across the street from me is a convenience mart run by an East Indian woman. I'd just ask her questions about India and getting her to help me write road signs."

Given Van Meach's own superpowers, he's attracted a few that don't benefit him as much—namely Germany, France, Japan, Great Britain and the United States.

Enter the world of *The Interman*, an all-new 128-page full-color graphic novel created by Jeff Parker from Octopus Comics. Described by Parker as a cross between Darwinist theory, spy thrillers and classic *Uncle Scrooge* comics, *The Interman* follows Meach (a young man who uses his gifts for various odd jobs) on a quest for his own survival that spans the globe. Luckily for Van, he has the capability to outswim killer whales at pressurized ocean depths, reject poison in his body by adapting the genetic make-up of a rainforest tree frog and mimic the martial arts mastery of ill-intentioned pursuers. While that brief description may give new meaning to the term "high concept," Parker assures potential readers that at the heart of the story lies an element that he feels the industry has been lacking as of late.

"With *The Interman*, I'm trying to create something new which, really, had just been ignored over the past few decades in comics—an adventure," explains Parker. "I just wanted to do a new kind of adventure hero, but at least in this story, he's not really heroic, but generally just trying to stay alive."

Van's origins lie in a top-secret, multi-government project called "Interman," where scientists kept certain stages of fetal maturation (i.e. the stages where the fetus still has gills and other structures that it loses over the course of birth) while proceeding with the normal development. In turn, the eventual being could achieve abilities that normal humans couldn't. The project was considered a failure due to the deaths of nearly all of the premature fetuses involved.

Unfortunately, Van was the only survivor of the abandoned project.

Now, he's both blessed and cursed with abilities far

QUICK STEADY When you've dealt with killer whales and hired assassins, rocky overhangs are a breeze for Van Meach.

LICENSE TO EEL Three on one may seem a tad unfair, unless you're the Interman, who has the power to mimic an electric eel's (and other animals') abilities.

beyond normal humans. Van has superhuman strength, animal-like endurance and reflexes, and the mental capacity to learn languages in seconds or lethal fighting styles by simple observation.

Once the C.I.A. realizes the only remaining subject of the embarrassing "Interman" project is indeed alive, they send out word to the fellow Interman nations (Great Britain, France, Japan and Germany) that Van must be destroyed. After all, a weapon like the Interman in the wrong hands could prove dangerous. Each nation in turn calls upon their most reliable hitman, and what develops is a globetrotting adventure of Van's survival.

When Parker promises adventure with *The Interman*, he's not kidding. Whether it's a chase scene through the Amazonian jungle, a swordfight in the Tower of London or a Jackie Chan-esque kung fu sequence in a Calcutta bazaar, each page delivers a punch that'll leave your head spinning. In addition, Parker's attention to government conspiracy and Indiana Jones-style situations guarantees that fans of Clancy-esque, widescreen thrillers will find themselves sweating profusely alongside Van. Parker's clean yet stylized art harkens back to the days of Dave Mazzucchelli's run on *Daredevil*.

While the surprise ending of the story will leave you stunned (and I'm not about to spoil it, but I've got one word for you—Interwoman!), Parker makes it quite obvious that a sequel to the graphic novel is in the works. While he prefers to keep the details under wraps for the time being, Parker's quick to drop hints as to what fans can expect in the next installment.

"Van crosses an industry even more dangerous than the espionage industry," hyped Parker. "No one will be expecting this. It's going to be a little more oddball than this story."

THE LAST WORD Part "X-Files," part 007 and part Clancy-esque thriller, *The Interman* adds a new twist to action heroes. Be sure you're wearing a seat belt when you read this story, because you might just get thrown from your seat! ■ **CASEY SEIJAS**

WANNA PICK THIS SERIES UP?

Call 1-888-COMIC BOOK to locate your nearest comic shop, or visit www.theinterman.com. Want to see your favorite indy title get some print in "Secret Stash"? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY, 10920 or at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com. Word.

HIDE 'N' SEEK

TRACK THESE BABIES DOWN

Does *The Interman* sounds like a good read? Then why not check out these titles as well? All items ship in February unless otherwise noted.

EVERYTHING ZEN Get ready, people of Earth!

The blue-skinned, alien ninja Zen returns this April in an all-new monthly series by creator Steve Stern with art by returning penciler Bill Maus. And if anyone out there is thinking that Zen's return is simply Stern's way of jumping on the '80s revival bandwagon, then you're in for a shock on the level of Zen's photon stick. Stern promises readers that Zen's new adventures will be ripped from the current headlines and deal with the heightened security world we currently live it.

Be on the lookout for *Zen* #0 at comic shops this April. **www.zenintergalaticninja.com** $2.95.

CLIMBING OUT IN STYLE Based on Brian Ralph's underground hit *Climbing Out* (which follows a caveman trapped underground following an earthquake), Highwater Books offers up four super-cool t-shirts starring characters from the series. Order one for yourself today! **www.highwaterbooks.com** $15.

YOUR CHEATIN' HEART *Hopeless Savages* penciler Christine Norrie offers up her first graphic novel this month with *Cheat* (from Oni Press), which follows the trials and tribulations of a young couple finding themselves growing apart in New York City. **www.onipress.com** $5.95.

SMALL PRESS SUCCESS Once again, the Big Boys are fishing in the small press pool for new talent. Image recently announced that they will begin publishing Scott Kurtz's *PvP* and Paul Grist's *Jack Staff* in early 2003, while Dark Horse has picked up Eric Powell's *The Goon* for a June start date.

TRADE SEASON IDW offers up not only the highly anticipated *30 Days of Night* TPB by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith (which also includes the exclusive eight-page tale in January's *Wizard Edge*), but also a *Wynonna Earp* TPB by writer Beau Smith (a.k.a. the Toughest Man in Comics). Each TPB is chock fulla extra features, so go get one. **www.ideaanddesignworks.com** $17.99 each. ■ CS

DEALING WITH THE DEVIL

Daredevil back issues hotter than Hell's Kitchen

It doesn't take radar senses to know that anything Daredevil is blazing hot.

With anticipation building for the "Daredevil" film arriving on Valentine's Day, demand for issues both old and new has skyrocketed. As fans dive into back-issue bins across the country searching for key issues related to the movie, top sellers include the first appearance of Bullseye (*Daredevil* #131), the first appearance of Elektra (*DD* #168), the death of Elektra (*DD* #191) and of course, *Daredevil* (vol. 1) #1.

"We can't hold onto anything Silver Age," says Bob Sowers, of Captain Comics in Hoover, Ala. "Just by chance, a collection came in that contained Good, maybe barely Fine copies of *Daredevil* #1 and #2. I've never seen two books fly off the wall faster than that."

Current issues are doing just as well. In recent months, orders for the current *Daredevil* series and the *Daredevil: The Target* and *Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra* mini-series have landed firmly in Diamond's Top 20.

"*Daredevil: Target* has been a steady seller, but *Ultimate Daredevil/Elektra* has been solid gold," reveals Mike Banks of Samurai Comics in Phoenix, Ariz. "That book just blew out of here in huge numbers. We're already close to selling out of issue #2 despite ordering almost double what we did with #1."

With the double-whammy of a movie adaptation (written by Bruce Jones) and the 25-cent *Daredevil* #41 that hit in January, Marvel's doing everything it can to turn theatergoers into comic readers.

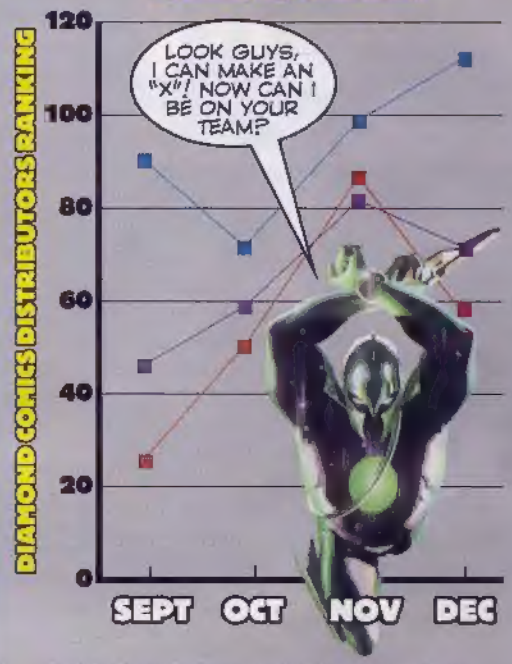
"Marvel's realized they have to have new content that's more specific to the movie audience," asserts Banks. "I think we'll see a lot of the general public coming in looking for stuff."

■ DAVE MARSHALL

LINEBYLINE

BREAK IT ON DOWN NOW!

TRACKING THE U-DECIDE SALES NUMBERS



Captain Marvel September: 26, October: 50, November: 84, December: 58

Ultimate Adventures September: 46, October: 59, November: 81, December: 71

Marville September: 85, October: 66, November: 99, December: 113

UPS & DOWNS

MOVERS AND SHAKERS IN THE INDUSTRY

I WONDER IF THIS GUY TASTES LIKE CALAMARI?

CAPTAIN MARVEL Looks like Rick Jones has finally proved his usefulness! Not only did *Captain Marvel* #4 climb a whopping 26 slots on this month's Diamond chart, but issues #2 and #3 of the relaunched series have attracted a substantial amount of back-market interest as retailers scaled way back after heavily ordering issue #1.

BATMAN Even after the overnight success of Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's debut issue, the Caped Crusader still has plenty of surprises under his utility belt. *Batman* bounced back from the No. 6 slot in November's Top 10 to No. 3 in December. Plus, both prints of *Batman* #608 are on the Hot 10 Comics list! (See page 123.)

FINALLY, THE PERFECT FIST! WAITAMINUTE...

AQUAMAN

BIG SCREEN-BOUND COMICS It's a notch that when a big comic-to-movie project is announced, current and back-issue sales shoot through the roof, but with so many comic films in development right now, there's a virtual comucopia of hit "movie" comics garnering tons of market interest, including *Daredevil*, *Incredible Hulk*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Hellboy* and the obligatory *30 Days of Night*.

ROBOTECH These big 'bots have never been on the same level as Transformers and have always attracted more of a cult following, which is probably why December's issues #0 and #1 didn't even break into the Top 20. While the Diamond chart doesn't account for reorders, it seems that the '80s well has started to run dry.

HELLBOY

AQUAMAN The JLA's salty seadog enjoyed a healthy debut as *Aquaman* #1 debuted in the No. 34 slot on Diamond's December chart. While that may not seem like much of a splash, keep in mind that Mr. Curry was swimming against the tide with three cancelled series under his seashell belt.

THE STATUE MARKET What was once a surging market of detailed niche collectibles has now seemingly suffered the same fate as the collectible card market of the early '90s: Oversaturation. Statues and busts sales have slowed down due to a glut of product, as even the brisk holiday shopping months were of little help.

HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

1 30 DAYS OF NIGHT #1

WRITER: Steve Niles
ARTIST: Ben Templesmith

Can nothing stop the juggernaut that *30 Days of Night* has become? After dropping to the No. 2 spot last month, IDW's breakout hit returns to prominence this month, reclaiming the No. 1 position on the Hot 10 list. Despite second printings and a trade paperback hitting stands in February, *30 Days* continues to burn up the back-issue bins, with some stores asking for as much as $32.50 for the first issue's first printing! At this point, *30 Days* has become less a buzz book and more an investment. **LAST MONTH:** 2

2 Y-THE LAST MAN #1

WRITER: Brian K. Vaughan
ARTISTS: Pia Guerra & Jose Marzan

Much like *30 Days of Night*, second printings and a trade paperback haven't put a damper on back-issue sales of this DC/Vertigo smash. It looks as though retailers are starting to learn from past mistakes. Where orders for this series were once low, storeowners now can't even keep *Y* in stock! So much so that *Y* just might follow fellow Vertigo sensation *Fables* into the elusive Top 100 by next month (for December, it lingered at No. 103). If you've read this series, there's really no reason to ask "Y." **LAST MONTH:** 3

3 FABLES #1

WRITER: Bill Willingham
ARTISTS: Lan Medina & Steve Leialoha

Fables, the second of Vertigo's dynamic duo of titles, remains solid among collectors, this month jumping up to No. 3 on Ye Olde Hot 10 List. While the super-rare Alex Maleev variant cover continues to be the issue most fanboys clamor for, the regular fairy-tale cover remains just as scarce, so good luck trying to find either one for any less than $12. **LAST MONTH:** 4

4 BATMAN #608 (1ST PRINT)

WRITER: Jeph Loeb
ARTISTS: Jim Lee & Scott Williams

Finally, a superhero book in the Hot 10! We were starting to get worried about you guys! Despite DC printing up a gazillion copies and retailers ordering said gazillion copies, there's still a gazillion collectors who can't get their hands on Loeb and Lee's premiere issue of *Batman*. Unless of course they're willing to cough up $7 or settle for the second printing. **LAST MONTH:** 1

5 DAREDEVIL #131

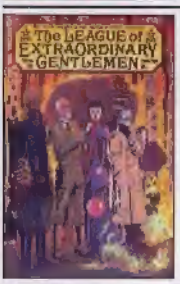
WRITER: Marv Wolfman
ARTISTS: Bob Brown & Klaus Janson

For the third month in a row, a classic *Daredevil* issue finds its way onto the Hot 10 list, this time with issue #131, the debut ish of the big screen-bound Bullseye. Thanks to the "Daredevil" movie hitting theaters this month, it's no wonder why classic *DD* issues (#168, #181) are getting more green than a seasick Kermit on the back market! **LAST MONTH: N.R. (Not Rated)**

6 SUPERGIRL #75

WRITER: Peter David
ARTISTS: Ed Benes & Alex Lei

Writer Peter David has one of the most loyal fanbases in comics. Case in point, *Supergirl*, an under-the-radar series which hasn't reared its blonde head on the Hot 10 list since the first issue back in 1996. Even with the series' recent cancellation, fans have been all over the current storyarc which sees the return of the original Silver Age Supergirl, Kara Zor-El. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**



7 LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN VOL. 2 #2

WRITER: Alan Moore
ARTIST: Kevin O'Neill

While Alan Moore's highly anticipated sequel to *League* would sell on its own, it's that way-underordered second issue that has collectors in a tizzy. With the "League" movie premiere drawing ever closer (and starring the irritable Sean Connery), count on this issue's price to rise in the coming months. **LAST MONTH:** 5

8 SHONEN JUMP #1

WRITERS: Various
ARTISTS: Various

Just when we were celebrating Pokémon's death knell, along came Yu-Gi-Oh! What does that have to do with this month's No. 8 book? Well, the fine folks over at Viz Comics packaged an exclusive Yu-Gi-Oh! card with *Shonen Jump* #1, causing ambitious collectors to snatch up the manga anthology. The card alone is going for as much as $20 online! **LAST MONTH:** 10

9 BATMAN #608 (2ND PRINT)

WRITER: Jeph Loeb
ARTISTS: Jim Lee & Scott Williams

Remember a little while ago when we said you could settle for the second printing of Loeb and Lee's premiere *Batman* issue? Well, we lied. Thanks to a super-cool variant cover by Lee, fans have been buying up the second print copies just as fast as the first, causing this bad boy to sell out faster than you can say "Hush yo' mouth!" **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

10 ULTIMATE WAR #1

WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTISTS: Chris Bachalo & Tim Townsend

Ultimate X-Men–big seller. *Ultimates*–even bigger seller. You see where we're going with this, right? Despite the fact that Marvel didn't give this baby the cardstock-cover treatment, sales are blazing through the roof, and shops across the country are reporting sell-outs for the mini-series squaring off Marvel's Ultimate big guns. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

THE HOT SEAT

This Month Featuring:

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS

WRITER OF MARVEL'S *ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN* AND *DAREDEVIL*, AND IMAGE'S *POWERS*

WIZARD: So, what's it like to be such a big shot with ***Ultimate Spider-Man*** that director Sam Raimi invites you to his office for a private screening of the Spider-Man movie?

BENDIS: Well, it wasn't private…Sam was there and I sat right next to Stan Lee for the whole me

Well, aren't you Mr. Hollywood.

I am doing the "Spider-Man" cartoon for MTV.

So you're just another reason MTV doesn't show videos anymore, huh?

Well…yeah…I guess I've become everything I hate. **"The Osbornes"** is pretty funny though.

Speaking of MTV, who's hotter Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera or Shakira?

Wow, tough question…I'm not sure, but I do know that **Skakira** isn't hot… she just thinks she is. Maybe someone should tell her that.

I'll pass it along.

Last time I was at MTV for a "Spider-Man" meeting they were doing auditions for "Dismissed." I actually heard a guy from the show say, "If you like blondes, tell us. If you like big asses, tell us. We need to know."

Did you answer?

No, I don't think I quite make the "Dismissed" look.

You are devilishly handsome.

Thanks…I think.

So, what's the worst idea you've had that made it into print?

[*Groan*] *Angels of Destruction* [a 1996 Malibu Comics one-shot].

I've never even heard of that…

Exactly.

Sorry. Anyway, I heard you used to work at McDonalds…

[*Laughs*] Yeah, on my last day the manager came over and put his hand on my shoulder and says, "Brian, there will always be a place for you at McDonalds." That statement alone made me never want to fail at comics. I never wanted to be a fry cook again. I always wanted to be a cashier though.

Ah, unfulfilled dreams. I hear you even had a stalker for a while.

Not really a stalker. But I did get letters from a guy who would cut stuff out and paste it together in odd arrangements. He was weird. His name was New Jetson.

What happened to him?

The last letter I got had the same design as the wallpaper in my bathroom. Like the exact same wallpaper was in his letter. That freaked me out, but it was his last letter. If you're out there New Jetson, I miss you!

Who's your best friend in comics?

[*Kabuki* creator] David Mack or [*Powers* artist] Mike Oeming. Hold on… maybe [Marvel execs] Bill Jemas and Joe Quesada—they sign the checks.

If for some odd reason someone wanted to make a movie of your life, who would play you?

That guy from **"The Shield"** [actor Michael Chiklis].

MICHAEL CHIKLIS

You mean the guy from "The Commish."

Well, I'm going with the more buffed up version.

You know he played Curly from the Three Stooges TV movie too, right?

Please don't run that picture…

■ MIKE COTTON

THE OSBORNES

SHAKIRA